THREE PLAYS

The Shadow:
The Mother:
The Secret Woman:

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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THREE PLAYS

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THE SHADOW
THE MOTHER
THE SECRET WOMAN

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

LONDON
DUCKWORTH AND CO.
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1913

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LONDON

THE SHADOW

BY THE SAME
AUTHOR

THE SECRET WOMAN
THE MOTHER
DOWN DARTMOOR WAY
CURTAIN RAISERS
A BREEZY MORNING
ETC. ETC.

CHARACTERS

WILLES GAY, *a butcher.* Aged 45.
THOMAS TURTLE, *a postmaster.* Aged 60.
PHILIP BLANCHARD, WILLES GAY'S *man.* Aged 28.
ELIAS WAYCOTT, *a gamekeeper.* Aged 30.
JOHNNY SLOCOMBE, *a boy.* Aged 12.
SARAH DUNNYBRIG. Aged 60.
HESTER DUNNYBRIG, *her daughter.* Aged 25.
NANNY COAKER, *a poacher's wife.* Aged 40.

The scene is laid at Little Silver, a village on the edge of Dartmoor.

CAST OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF

THE SHADOW

AT THE GAIETY THEATRE, MANCHESTER,
OCTOBER 6, 1913

PRODUCED BY LEWIS CASSON

WILLES GAY	PERCY FOSTER
THOMAS TURTLE	BREMBER WILLS
PHILIP BLANCHARD	JULIUS SHAW
ELIAS WAYCOTT	BERNARD COPPING
JOHNNY SLOCOMBE	TOMMY NICKSON
SARAH DUNNYBRIG	LUCY BEAUMONT
HESTER DUNNYBRIG	SYBIL THORNDIKE
NANNY COAKER	MARY BYRON

ACT I

SCENE: *The little general shop of Sarah Dunnybrig at Little Silver, Dartmoor. A counter runs across the midst of the shop, and behind it are shelves divided by a glazed door with a curtain over the lower panes. To the right of the door the shelves contain bottles of sweet stuff, boxes of chocolate and tins of biscuits. There are also on the counter bottles of ginger beer and groceries—butter, cheese, a piece of bacon, a box of bloaters, and a basket of eggs. To the left of the door the shelves hold bales of cloth and boxes of haberdashery. Hanging on strings across the shop are bright kerchiefs, pieces of lace, straw hats and stockings. Gay print stuffs are displayed, with ties, men's braces and linen shirts. Beyond the groceries, to the left, is disposed hardware stock and ironmongery. Here are spades, scythes, billhooks, carpenter's tools, hedgers' gloves, brooms, a mangle and other things, including a card of the bright brass decorations that cart-horses wear on their harness, and cards of knives. In front of the counter, on the ground, are one or two open bags of flour, peas and grain, and upon the counter stands a large pair of scales*

with weights. Advertisements of chocolate, dog-biscuit, wholemeal flour, chicken food and so forth hang where they can be displayed to advantage. There are one or two broad-sheets of sales of stock, and the poster of a coming circus hanging from the counter. In large letters on a paper scroll hanging across the shop, where all customers can read, are painted the words, "IF YOU DON'T SEE WHAT YOU WANT ASK FOR IT." *At the left end of the counter is a hatch thrown open and giving access from behind the counter into the shop. There is a door opening into the shop from the street. The upper half is glazed and a bell is fastened to it, which rings when the door is opened.*

[*The bell rings and* NANNY COAKER *enters. She looks round cautiously, but nobody answers the summons. She keeps her eye on the door behind counter, and slips a few biscuits into her pocket. Then she hammers upon the counter with a coin which she holds.*

NANNY. Shop! Shop!

[*Enter, from door behind counter,* SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

SARAH. [*Sleepily.*] If I wasn't having forty winks, Nanny Coaker! I hope I haven't wasted your time?

NANNY. No, no. I ain't been here a second. My husband's home again.

SARAH. Has he come out in a Christian spirit?

NANNY. No, he ain't; and more would you if they'd

given you a month's hard for stealing pheasants what you never took.

SARAH. They proved it, Nanny.

NANNY. Never! 'Twas only Elias Waycott's word against Mr. Coaker's. And who be Elias Waycott——?

SARAH. 'Tis silly to talk like that. Everybody knows Elias. He's straight as a line.

NANNY. He's like his uncle Jacob—a hateful, cruel devil.

SARAH. Don't say such things. Mr. Jacob be a power in the land—rich and strong—and Elias is his lawful heir, and a man very well thought upon by his betters.

NANNY. You wait—you wait and see what comes of it. My husband's a proper tiger when he's angered. He'll lie behind a hedge for gamekeeper, I shouldn't wonder! He'll be evens with him—he's swore it—and I want half a pound of bacon for Mr. Coaker's supper. The poor wretch haven't put his teeth into a bit of decent meat since they locked him up.

SARAH. [*Taking knife and cutting and weighing bacon.*] I hope he'll be good and peaceful. 'Tis very sad that such a clever man as him should always be in mischief.

Enter WILLES GAY.

NANNY. My husband's home again, Mr. Gay.

GAY. And how did he like it?

NANNY. The work was nought.

GAY. There's no man works so hard to escape work as your man. [*To* SARAH.] Have 'e got any more of them big meat hooks, Mrs. Dunnybrig?

SARAH. You had the last. Shall I order some?

GAY. 'Tis no odds. I can do without. And I'll take back one of they fine bloaters for my missis.

NANNY. There's nought a woman with child fancies like a bloater. 'Twas the same with me; I properly raged for 'em.

SARAH. [*Handing over bacon, which she has wrapped up in a piece of newspaper.*] Fourpence, Nanny, please.

[NANNY *gives her a shilling, and she opens till for change.*

GAY. God knows how I shall come through it. My knees knock when I think about it. There's five thousand women die in child-bed every year, I'm told.

SARAH. All along of tight-lacing. 'Tis their own fault—not Nature's. Vanity have been the death of millions of us.

GAY. You can't bring that against my Eliza. She's broader than she's long. An uglier woman don't live; and she knows it.

NANNY. She's all right. 'Tis shameful such a prosperous man as you should look on the dark side of things.

GAY. I grant you I'm never hopeful for myself; but I always take a bright view about everybody else.

NANNY. No use being a cheerful man to your

neighbours if you behave like a death's head at home.

SARAH. [*Giving* NANNY *a handful of biscuits.*] Here's a present for your childer.

NANNY. You kind creature! I was looking at them biscuits and thinking of my little boys just afore you come in the shop. Well, good evening. And you cheer up your wife, Mr. Gay, like you cheer up other people. And tell her to walk the soles off her shoes, instead of sitting to home mooning over "The Churching of Women." Time enough for that presently. [*Exit* NANNY COAKER.

GAY. Us'll hope her husband's had his lesson and will be a reformed character in future.

SARAH. He's breathing out vengeance against the gamekeeper, Elias Waycott, that had him put away. [*She gives him fish wrapped up in paper.*]

GAY. [*Handing twopence to* SARAH *and putting the fish into his pocket.*] There's a man, now!

SARAH. Don't you say nothing against him to me.

GAY. Not I. A very proper, honest chap. You want Elias for a son-in-law—eh?

SARAH. And why not?

GAY. A good, gentle, sensible creature, and he have a great power of friendship.

[*Enter* THOMAS TURTLE. *He carries a sheet of notepaper.*

GAY. Here's postmaster! Good evening, postmaster.

TURTLE. Good evening, Willes Gay. You are

fortunate to be here. Something has happened—a very remarkable, dangerous thing.

SARAH. There! And if I wasn't saying but yester-even that nought ever happens in Little Silver.

TURTLE. We have our share of adventures—and everything comes to my ears first. Nothing misses me.

GAY. Us all run to you, postmaster, because you be made of brains—to say it civilly.

SARAH. There's none can put two and two together like you, Mr. Turtle.

TURTLE. The Lord helping—always the Lord helping. 'Tis only by keeping my eyes on Heaven that I walk the earth so steady, Butcher Gay.

GAY. A regular prophet, I'm sure.

TURTLE. I don't say that. 'Tis a big word; yet I'm often surprised to see how the Almighty and me look at things from the same point of view. [*Giving paper to* SARAH.] This document must be stuck up on the winder, Mrs. Dunnybrig, for all eyes to see. In a word, Farmer Waycott is missing and there's every reason to fear the worst.

SARAH. Good powers! Jacob Waycott!

GAY. A very powerful, rich man; and yet a very hard man where money's concerned. Would sell the primrosen off his mother's grave, that man.

TURTLE. He may be dead, and you mustn't speak against the dead, Willes Gay, because their mouths are stopped. The dead have no friends. Jacob Waycott's pony has been found with its neck broken

in Cann Quarry—saddle and reins and stirrups and all complete. And the bit in its teeth, they say. But Jacob Waycott has not been found.

SARAH. My stars! If he's gone, 'twill be a far reaching thing.

GAY. A lot of difference 'twill make all round. A good few I could name will dance for joy—to say it civilly.

SARAH. I'm in a twitter a'ready. This means——

GAY. It means my man, Philip Blanchard, will be after your Hester—that's one thing it means.

SARAH. Yes, faith—and another besides him—Jacob's nephy!

TURTLE. If old Waycott's gone, then Elias Waycott will be greatly uplifted. He's a very humble chap, but a well-meaning Christian. I shall support him for one.

GAY. And so shall I. And my Eliza, too.

SARAH. But Jacob may be living.

TURTLE. I think he's dead. 'Tis borne in upon me that he's dead. I see it afore my mind's eye. The pony runs away in Cann Wood.

GAY. And Jacob be brushed off its back, like a fly off a mutton chop.

TURTLE. They'll find him presently, and bury him along with the Waycott race, where they lie in their solemn company north side the yard. A great funeral 'twill be.

GAY. A black revel, I warrant you; and better than a fair for most folk.

TURTLE. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and I was the only man brave enough to tell him so. But we must not judge.

SARAH. There'll be few tear' flowing—unless Elias——

GAY. 'Twill take an onion in his handkerchief to bring 'em. You can't ask the people to weep. 'Tis enough if they don't shout for joy when the earth rattles on that man.

TURTLE. He's met his Maker and his Judge. And, looking forward, I see the future unroll as doth a scroll.

GAY. Trust you for that.

SARAH. Just when we were saying nothing ever happened, Mr. Gay!

GAY. Why, the world was never so full of things happening. There's this here fearful adventure, and Mrs. Gay with child, and the war in South Africa, and Lord knows what beside. Take my man, Philip Blanchard—this puts him on his feet again for one. Because, if Mr. Jacob be gone, young Elias will reign, and he'll let off many a debtor and be gentle and patient with all.

TURTLE. Don't be too sure of that. Sometimes the soft get hard in self-defence when they find the whip in their hand. Besides, 'tis well known to me that Jacob was very angry with his nephy so late as yesterday. Raged against him above all reason. Still, there's been no time to do anything, and if the old man has been snatched to his account, then Elias inherits for certain.

SARAH. And that means—oh, what don't it mean? Elias wants my Hester, and has been after her this two years in his humble, patient fashion. And Philip Blanchard too—he'll be on to her hot and fierce and fiery now—as only such a red man knows how to be. For he's free to wed.

GAY. Two on the war-path!

TURTLE. All these things are known to me. I can see cause and effect working as easily as common men can see the rain falling out of a cloud. Phil Blanchard knows that Elias won't force the mortgage and ruin him; and Elias, knowing that money is power, will——

GAY. Why, of course.

TURTLE. Hush, Gay—I'm speaking. It follows that both young fellows——

Enter ELIAS WAYCOTT.

TURTLE. Ah! Men don't call me a prophet for nothing, Elias!

ELIAS. I—I. What a rally of neighbours!

TURTLE. We understand you, Elias, and we think none the worse of you. The police are busy. Your late uncle will soon be found.

ELIAS. Such a little, light man! No doubt he was thrown and——

TURTLE. He's dead. I can see him lying in the woods with his busy brains scattered round him.

SARAH. 'Tis a wisht thought.

GAY. Give you joy of the future, Elias. I shall

pray for your happiness, because you are a very wise and clever young man, in my opinion. I hope you'll do nothing but good, and make the name of Waycott bring blessings instead of curses.

ELIAS. Thank you, Mr. Gay. 'Tis a great responsibility. Time enough—time enough. I'm here now——

SARAH. She's out. She'll be back along any minute.

TURTLE. Well, the future's in God's hands, as usual, and I think He's on your side, Elias; and if He is, then so am I. When first I mind you, you was just a little, gentle, girl-faced, orphan boy, and I never expected that you'd take to gamekeeping for a living. But human nature's full of surprises; though, in fairness to myself, I can say it don't often surprise me.

ELIAS. I liked the open air life. 'Tis quiet and lonely. And I liked the wild creatures.

TURTLE. It draws young people, same as the sea do. There's a spice of danger and darkness to it.

GAY. Poacher Coaker, for instance. He's got his knife in you proper—for bearing witness against him.

ELIAS. I was very sorry about that. I'd cautioned him twice. I had no choice, Mr. Gay. We've all got to do our duty.

GAY. You watch it, however—a very revengeful man.

TURTLE. You'll have to lift your brain to higher things than pheasants and hares now, Elias

ELIAS. I suppose I shall, postmaster.

GAY. No doubt you'll soon larn to handle money as easy as you handle ferrets.

ELIAS. Money can bite, too, they say. I'm all in a miz-maze about it. But there's one thing——

TURTLE. [*Tolerantly.*] I know—I know. What don't I know? She's a bowerly maiden and a steady church-goer. You'll offer a reward for the body, of course? As a matter of worldly wisdom, I advise that, for if by any chance he isn't dead and comes to life again, 'twould hurt his feelings and anger him a good bit if you'd done nothing to find him.

GAY. You make a fuss, Elias. It won't bring him to life, please God, so you need fear nought.

TURTLE. Let me advise you to offer twenty pounds and no less for the carcase of the man.

ELIAS. Say fifty, postmaster.

GAY. By gor! You're going it.

TURTLE. I will tell them at the Police Station that you offer fifty pounds for the discovery of Jacob Waycott's body—dead or alive.

[*Writes it on the note-paper he is carrying.*

GAY. Not if he's alive, surely?

TURTLE. 'Tis only a matter of form. He's dead—haven't I said so?

GAY. An ugly corpse that man—the very foxes would run from it.

TURTLE. Be careful how you tell these things to your wife, Butcher Gay. You don't want your offspring to be born with a blood-red hand on his forehead, nor nothing like that.

GAY. Good Lord, postmaster! 'Tis bad enough as it is without no horrors. When you think that every year five thousand women——

[*Exeunt* WILLES GAY *and* THOMAS TURTLE.

ELIAS. 'Tis safe enough. He's gone. I'm so sure he's dead as I'm sure I'm alive. And, of course, my first thought was your Hester. I hope it don't seem as if I was in too much of a hurry; but I'm so terrible feared that——

SARAH. I hope she's for you. I'd wish nothing better for her. But I can't tell you what she's thinking about. She keeps her heart inside her lips even from me. She's a guarded sort of woman. But she's always spoke of you with great kindness and respect.

ELIAS. She's far too good for me, or any man; but if true love and worship counts——

Enter JOHNNY SLOCOMBE.

JOHNNY. A penn'orth of pineapple drops, please ma'am.

SARAH. So you shall then, Johnny. How's your father to-day?

JOHNNY. [*Putting down penny.*] He's a lot better along o' hearing Mr. Waycott be lost. [*Takes the sweets.*] Faither says if Mr. Waycott be gone dead, he'll hoist up his jubilee flag and go and get drunk for joy.

SARAH. He didn't ought to talk like that.

JOHNNY. Didn't he, ma'am? I'll tell him. But he hated Mr. Waycott that fearful.

[*Exit* JOHNNY SLOCOMBE.

SARAH. Who didn't, for that matter?

ELIAS. He was a man without any milk of human kindness. 'Twas dried up in him. All for power he was.

SARAH. He ruled by fear.

ELIAS. We were sadly out at the end—him and me.

SARAH. Like a bit of stone when his mind was made up.

ELIAS. I did the best I could to pleasure him. Many little friendly actions in my small way I did, Mrs. Dunnybrig. But a man's a man and can't do impossible things. He wanted me to marry Milly Masters; and her father was set on it too. Then they'd have had a ring fence round their two big, famous farms and died happy.

SARAH. You can't make young people marry to build old men's ring fences—'tisn't in reason. [*Looking out of window.*] Here's my girl coming. I'll be gone and leave you to set on to her. Stick this in the window, Elias. 'Tis ready gummed.

[*She gives Elias the paper that* MR. TURTLE *brought, and then goes off through door behind counter.* ELIAS *licks the paper, sticks it on to glass window of shop door and then opens the door for* HESTER DUNNYBRIG.

Enter HESTER DUNNYBRIG.

ELIAS. Good evening, Hester.

HESTER. You! I didn't expect you to-night. Bain't you too busy to run about?

ELIAS. The first business of my life was here.

HESTER. 'Tis a terrible come-along-of-it. 'Twould be false to say I'm sorry for you. I'm like the rest—glad for you; and glad for others beside you.

ELIAS. I know—I know. It seems hard-hearted, yet 'tis natural. He kept a heavy hand on Little Silver.

HESTER. Tom Nosworthy was saying in his comical way, that they did ought to put up a statue to the pony. But us can't swear he's dead yet.

ELIAS. He's dead, Hester. I feel it—else I wouldn't be here on my great errand. He's met a fatal mishap and they'll find him in Cann Woods afore long. So like as not I shall myself this night. I've offered fifty pounds for him and master has thrown open the woods for the searchers.

HESTER. You'll be rich now; and never a man like to use the money kinder or cleverer.

ELIAS. Rich—eh? Shall I be rich, I wonder? Money can't buy what I want. So I'm neither richer nor poorer yet. But I'm free—if he's gone, I'm free; and I'll not speak scornful of money neither, for it rounds the corners of life and smoothes the rough places. But first—first—afore all—oh, Hester, 'tis a rash and reckless thing; but 'tis humble too—I'd be humble and daring in a breath if I could. I feel

hopeless about it, yet 'tis no use feeling that. I ought to have a cheerful conceit of myself, because you can't fight proper if you don't think you be going to win. Yet how can a man like me dare to think he be going to win—you? But so it is, Hester. I love you and I have done this two year. So long ago as that I began—a queer, gentle, sad feeling first. It drove me to the deepest places in the woods. Then it growed to be the salt of my waking hours. It made me feel I was born, Hester. And the day without a sight of you was a blank day; and the day I saw you was a good day; and the day I spoke to you and touched your hand was a day of days. A wonderful, deep-moving creation—love of woman. It made me kinder to all the world. It made me kill the creatures kinder—aye, and be sorry to kill 'em. I'm glad I shan't kill no more now. . . . So there it is—I offer myself—though a thing of little wit or worth. . . . A poor sort of husband, I reckon; but God's my judge, I'd leave no prayer of yours unanswered that was in my power to grant. My love be like this: I want for your life to be all peace and plenty and your days all joy. I'd be doorkeeper for you, Hester, and stand between you and everything that's sad and cruel and difficult. That's the best I can plan for myself—just to help make your life a better thing.

HESTER. You gentle creature! Was ever such a man as you, Elias? You teach a girl to say "no" to you, by the humble fashion you ask.

ELIAS. Do I, Hester?

HESTER. For sure. 'Tisn't the way to make love, I reckon. And yet 'tis beautiful. Only the world's hard—hard and busy and selfish and miserable. And when people like you come along and offer everything for nothing, like cheap Jack at the Fair, the world doubts 'em, or else laughs at 'em.

ELIAS. You can't have anything for nothing, Hester.

HESTER. No, you can't. So 'tis silly to think to be doorkeeper to a woman's life and say you're content to stand on her threshold and fright away trouble. A scarecrow does that for corn. Marriage be bed and board and give and take and rough and tumble, for better, for worse. 'Tis reality—not make-believe—a live, working thing—built to stand a lifetime if it be built right. You mustn't make your wife an image to pray to. She's got to be half yourself and share the fight as well as the fun. And she's got to love as well as be loved.

ELIAS. That's right. 'Tis marriage in a nutshell—to share all—love included. 'Twould be awful for a woman to give her body and keep back her heart.

HESTER. Awful sometimes; sometimes only cruel sad. If I took you, Elias—there'd be no sadness like our sadness.

ELIAS. You can't love me, Hester.

HESTER. I do love you; I won't lie; but 'tis cold comfort and you needn't look like that. I'm not very clever at finding words and this beats me; but I've

got to explain. Of course a woman knows like lightning when a man loves her. Only men blunder about that; women never. I've seen this longful time that you meant to offer when the way was smooth. So 'tis no surprise. And I say again, Elias, that I do love you, for you're a rare sort of chap and a woman ought to be proud to take your fancy. But—oh, 'tis hard to explain——

ELIAS. Then don't try. I understand without words. There's things beyond words. This is not your fault—only my misfortune. You love me in a sort of way—you've said it. But not the marriage way. Just cool friendship—eh, Hester?

HESTER. 'Tis like you to make it easy for me. Yes, I'm proud to be your friend—always, always. There never was a man just like you afore; and the strangeness of you and the gentleness of you will always stand against you with us stupid fools.

ELIAS. I daresay I could be a bit more bold and blusterous if I was to try, Hester.

HESTER. Not you—you're a gentleman—that's what's the matter with you, Elias. And I ain't used to that sort. A man I understand, but not a gentleman.

ELIAS. Good-bye for the present, Hester. You'll forgive me for asking?

HESTER. Forgive you! You're one in a thousand I tell you—rarer than that gold bird as came to the woods in the spring. [*Takes his hand.*] And if 'tis in our power to serve you, me and mine

will proudly do so; I pray you'll let us be your friends.

ELIAS. You and yours—it lies there, Hester. I understand. And I say "God bless you and yours."

[*The bell rings violently and the door is thrust open. Enter* PHILIP BLANCHARD *in his working clothes—a butcher's blue blouse, with blood-stained white apron over it.*

PHILIP. What ho, Elias! Give 'e good luck, my son! Everybody's in a hurry to think this brave news be true, and none more than me. But I say 'tis too good to be true. Such rare fortune don't happen.

ELIAS. You mean my uncle Jacob? I judge it's true enough, Blanchard.

PHILIP. A worthless, hard-hearted old devil—though your uncle. He ground the face of the poor for fifty years and I hope he'll be found, if 'tis only for the pleasure we'll all take in spitting on his grave. And come to think of it, we're all at your mercy now, Elias!

HESTER. A man made of mercy.

ELIAS. [*To* HESTER.] Good-bye. I shall be busy for a bit now. We may not meet again very quick.

HESTER. You're welcome as the flowers whenever you be pleased to come, Elias.

[*She goes to the door and opens it for him.*

PHILIP. Don't you get down-daunted and woe-begone and frightened because you be rich, Waycott. You'll soon grow used to it. And don't you ax me to touch my hat to 'e, because I never will. Ha, ha!

ELIAS. I shall be just the same as I was afore, Blanchard.

PHILIP. You think so, but you won't.

[*Exit* ELIAS WAYCOTT.

PHILIP. The power in that meek chap's hands! Think of it. Just a fly stings a pony, and it bolts and lets the life out of a rascal; and then the whole face of the world is changed.

HESTER. Because a good man follows a bad.

PHILIP. Exactly so! And you know where I'd have the first change fall—you know—behind them beautiful, misty, grey eyen of yours. The first moment I heard it, it flashed over me like a flame of fire! "I can ax her now," I said. And here I be, and I'll answer as well as ax, for I'll not take "no"—not from your own lips will I take it—no, nor yet if all the angels in heaven and devils in hell said "no!" I've been burning away for 'e for a thousand years, and roaming out o' nights, and damning the moon, and blasting fate and chance and biting my nails to the quick—look at 'em—and all to hit on a plan. And now—Hester—for God's sake come in here—inside my arms quick and say you'll marry me afore Michaelmas—else there'll be nothing but cinders left of me.

HESTER. Oh, Phil, d'you mean it? Such a fiery, headlong, godless man as you be. I'm afeard of 'e.

PHILIP. You afeard? You ban't afeard of nothing on two legs—that I'll swear. And I'd lay down all my lives for 'e, if I had as many as a cat. You darling thing—almost too soft and round for a gert

chap like me to cuddle. Yet I'll be so gentle—so gentle as I be when I kill the lambs! Greedy—greedy as the grave I be for 'e, Hester! All—all—body and soul I'll have—not a very patient build of man—you know that. But—come close—come close. Oh God, I want to eat you!

HESTER. You savage thing!

PHILIP. I'll do deeds above all that was ever done for 'e! I'd fight this world and the next for 'e. And you're the fighting sort, for all you're such a soft-eyed creature. There's a lot of granite hid in you too.

HESTER. You've got to be hard to the world.

PHILIP. Hard to the world but soft to each other. Dark to the world but light to each other.

HESTER. You trust nought and believe in nought save yourself, Phil. 'Tis dangerous.

PHILIP. I'll believe in you then; and I'll believe in God if you'll take me. 'Tis only a fine, waking, working God could make such a piece as you for a man. [*Puts his arms round her.*

HESTER. Before I speak——

PHILIP. You have spoke, else you wouldn't be here. Your eyes have spoke, and your round bosom panting like the sea! I be drownin' in joy!

HESTER. And so be I, Phil.

[*Their lips join and remain joined.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *Parlour of* PHILIP BLANCHARD'S *cottage. Time evening. Upon a table in the middle of the room stand a bottle of spirits and glasses. An oil lamp burns on the table and a woman's workbox and sewing lie under the light. Two old easy chairs stand beside the hearth, where a small fire burns. A kettle steams on the hob. Over the mantelshelf and on the walls are familiar old pictures from illustrated journals. A few pot plants stand on the window-sill and the white blinds are drawn behind them. The room is poor, but not lacking in comfort, and the light is bright and genial. Six months have passed since the events of the first Act.*

[*Enter* PHILIP BLANCHARD, *followed by* SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

PHILIP. She'll be down house in a minute. We've got a visitor to-night.

SARAH. I had a message for her from Mrs. Gay, that's all. She's feeling worse than usual and very wishful for Hester's company.

PHILIP. Bother the woman! But, of course, she

must go. Willes Gay means to let me have a share in the business.

SARAH. A share? That's news.

PHILIP. Keep it quiet. He'll bring it out in his own time. No credit to me, I reckon, but thanks to Hester. His wife dotes on her, and she must keep in with Eliza Gay, of course.

SARAH. Who be coming to-night, then?

PHILIP. A very big man. No less than Elias Waycott.

SARAH. I heard he was home.

PHILIP. Yes—back from his travels. Very near round the world he's wandered, they say. But he's the man he always was, and be coming without any fuss to see me and Hester. The world don't change him. He'd be just so humble if he'd travelled to the moon.

SARAH. How things happen! I prayed to God six months ago that Hester would take him and not you, Phil.

PHILIP. Natural enough, mother. I don't blame you. He's worth a hundred of me—in money and brains both.

SARAH. Not for Hester. The Lord knowed best. You was the man for her. Bright as a rose and joyous as a bird on a bough is she. She told me a bit back-along that she never thought no human could be so happy as her.

PHILIP. Same here. I wouldn't change with the King of England. The world's a very good place.

SARAH. 'Tis like Elias to harbour no feeling. Or if he do, he'll hide it.

[*Enter* HESTER. *She carries a bright gilt clock.* PHILIP *hastens forward and takes it from her.*

HESTER. 'Tis Elias—his wedding gift, you remember. Too grand to use every day till we get up in the world a bit and have a better house presently. But he's coming to-night, so I thought us would put it on the mantelshelf.

PHILIP. You clever woman! I'll wind it up.

[*Looks at his watch and sets the clock going.*

SARAH. Mrs. Gay wants you—'tis that I came for. She's took very queer and thinks she's going to die afore morning.

HESTER. I'll run over a bit later. I can't come just yet. Stop and see Elias, mother.

SARAH. Nay, I must be gone—I'm busy. And I'm terrible glad to hear this about Phil and Mr. Gay.

HESTER. A share in the business—'tis great news.

SARAH. So 'tis then. Us'll hope 'tis the beginning of fortune. [*Kisses* HESTER.] Good night—good night, Phil.

PHILIP. Good night, mother.

[*Exit* SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

PHILIP. Put out the box of pipes, Hester. He loved a long clay—like all they thoughtful men. And don't forget the lemon and sugar. He'll see you a bit fatter than you was.

HESTER. And a mighty deal happier.

PHILIP. Yet us didn't ought to be too cheerful

afore him neither, for 'twill make him feel the more what he's lost.

HESTER. You thoughtful man! But 'tis hard to pull a long face when you be full of good news. He's not the sort to grudge us our happiness. We shall have our bad times like the rest.

PHILIP. Never—not so long as we can——

[*Puts his arms round her and kisses her. She returns the embrace. There is a knock at the door.*

PHILIP. Here, dammy! Us can't be honeymooning for ever!

[HESTER *goes to the door and admits* ELIAS WAYCOTT. *She shakes hands with him very warmly.*

HESTER. You're properly welcome, I'm sure. Come in—come in.

PHILIP. Give me your coat—fur on the collar—look, Hester! I lay Dartymoor air strikes terrible shrewd after foreign parts, Elias?

ELIAS. 'Tis good to breathe it again, however.

PHILIP. Well, you be the monkey that have seen the world, and no mistake!

ELIAS. So I have—so I have; but there's no place like home, Philip.

HESTER. Be you going to live in your uncle's house?

ELIAS. I shall do so.

PHILIP. And turn farmer?

ELIAS. I'm doubtful as to that. But work I must.

PHILIP. Tired of play I reckon. Do 'e smoke the old "churchwardens," or be you got too fine now?

ELIAS. I've given up tobacco.

PHILIP. Well, well—that's bad!

HESTER. Sit down, Elias.

ELIAS. Life's a very wonderful thing when you see it like what I have—all colours and in all countries.

PHILIP. I'll warrant 'tis a proper circus. You'll drink anyway—Hester's mixing. You mustn't say "no" to that.

ELIAS. Just a spot then—no more.

[HESTER *brews some drink.*

ELIAS. You see, Nature's been my guide till now—just the life of the woods and the wild creatures. But I soon found it weren't enough. You can't learn the truth from squirrels; you can't pick up the wisdom of the world and your duty to the world from trees. I be a poor learner—— But I'm not here to chatter about myself.

HESTER. Yes, yes; that's what we want to hear. You found the world a big place?

ELIAS. That I have, Mrs. Blanchard.

HESTER. "Hester" to you, Elias.

PHILIP. There's too much sea in the world from the look of the map—that's what I always say.

ELIAS. Not a drop! The sea's a great peace-maker. It have kept humans off each other's throats time and again; and given the nations a chance to still their anger and hatred afore they come to blows.

PHILIP. Well, you be going to set the world right with the best of them now—such a clever, deep chap as you be.

ELIAS. I must try and set myself right. I've been reading a pack of books. 'Tis strange how these wise men, that write the books, do think things out to the bottom, till your head spins. Yet even the wisest of 'em contradict each other—just like you and I might, Philip!

PHILIP. That's their way of fighting—to tell each other they be damned liars—in book language.

ELIAS. Some men fight the world and some turn their backs on the world and fight themselves. But to tell the truth I'm no fighter.

PHILIP. There's happiness to be got out of fighting all the same, and there's the glory of winning.

HESTER. The poor have got to fight.

ELIAS. When you name "happiness"—you name a very queer contrivance. The path of happiness be hid, like the path of a bird in the air. It's going and coming is a secret. It don't depend on fighting, or running away, nor on money, nor poverty, nor on sense, nor luck, nor health, nor sickness. Happiness be a natural gift, like Hester's grey eyes and your great arm, Phil; and life can't make you miserable if Nature's planned for you to be happy.

HESTER. That's right enough—look at me and my husband.

ELIAS. I was always a twilight sort of man myself; but the less you hope, the less you'll suffer.

HESTER. A great gift of looking backward you had, and living in the past.

ELIAS Not a very tight hold on the future—nor yet on life for that matter. God forgive me, I doubt if I ever value life enough. Yes, I cast my gaze a good bit behind me. The past always seemed a sad thing to me—just because 'twas gone for ever and ever.

PHILIP. There's always the future and the chance of luck. The past be dead; the future's alive.

ELIAS. That queer I was as a stripling boy! Why, I'd mourn that I couldn't bathe in the same river twice, because the water was always running away!

PHILIP. What a thought!

ELIAS. Then again I could find it in me to be sorry for the flowers. For why? Because no flower ever sees its own fruit.

PHILIP. [*Looking at his wife.*] I know a flower as will. [*To* ELIAS.] These be brain-sick fancies—not worthy of such a man as you, Elias. Yet I'll grant this—the less wit, the more happiness. Maybe that's why I'm so cheerful and always laughing.

ELIAS. If you see the kingdoms of the world in a thinking spirit, you can't be happy no more.

PHILIP. Then I'll bide at home and look no deeper than my own hopes. Yet you're one of the lucky ones, for you've been poor and you are rich. You see clear, because you know what the poor know, and money can never blind you, like it does them that are born to it.

HESTER. Be the lawyers all friendly, Elias?

ELIAS. Couldn't be more so. But the Law's a very cautious creature. The Law won't let a vanished man be dead for seven year. But in my case, that don't make it difficult, because there's no will and I'm sole heir.

HESTER. I've often thought the old man was knocked on the head—else surely his bones would have been found afore now.

ELIAS. 'Tis a fearful idea, but the lawyers and the police are of the same mind.

PHILIP. There's a score of ill-used men must have itched to do it.

ELIAS. Like enough. He was a great devourer of widow's houses and merciless in his dealings. The books show that. Cruel hard where money was the matter.

PHILIP. Take me—I might have done it. Take you—you might have done it. And if the murderer turned up to-morrow, there's not a man on earth would want to punish him.

ELIAS. Don't talk so rash and reckless, Philip. There's the Law—a dark, heartless thing above all feeling. There's Justice, which works for the dead as well as for the living. And murder's murder, and Justice hangs a man for it.

PHILIP. [*Laughing.*] Then be hanged to Justice and let the Law swing on its own gallows afore it finds the doer.

ELIAS. I'd sooner think 'twas a fatal accident, and

that he'd been knocked off his pony and flung down one of they holes of the old copper mine in Cann Wood.

HESTER. He might lie there till doom and never be found.

PHILIP. No carrion will choke a crow, so we'll hope the birds and foxes and other varmints got a meal off his bones. One stinging wasp less in the world. But he stored a bit of stolen honey for others to use. Afore my father died he bested Jacob Waycott, and old Jacob got back on me. That's how 'twas. He wouldn't let me pay the mortgage on they fields that father left me, though they were my whole fortune. "The sins of the fathers shall break the children's backs," that's what he said, and laughed to see my trouble.

ELIAS. That'll be all right, Philip. There's none to question what I'm pleased to do.

HESTER. You good man! There's many be blessing you already.

ELIAS. What for? 'Tis common fair play. I only want peace; and the best way to get peace yourself is to bring it to others.

PHILIP. Peace ban't everything. 'Tis a sure sign you be getting old when you seek peace and the chimney-corner. I'm for a bit o' fighting, and dancing, and laughing I am—so's Hester.

ELIAS. 'Tis a great gift of laughter you always had. I envy you that.

HESTER. Us must larn you to laugh, Elias.

[*Fills his glass again.*

PHILIP. A tramp taught me to laugh. A lazy, worthless dog, and dead years agone. Laughed at work; laughed at wickedness; laughed at forty shillings or a month; laughed at the justices of the peace; laughed at life, and, when it came, laughed at death. I sometimes think if I was to listen, I'd hear him laughing still in his nameless grave.

[*A knock at the door.* PHILIP *opens it and admits* WILLES GAY, *who enters hatless and very anxious and haggard.*

PHILIP. Good Lord, master! What's come to 'e?

GAY. Fatherhood's come to me! They be making me a father so fast as it can be done, and I must have company. The bolt have fallen. The doctor's there, and when I stood before him in all the solemn terror of a coming father, he told me to run away and play! Those were his words. My wife face to face with death or victory—and I'm told to run away and play!

ELIAS. There's a tribe of savages that put the fathers to bed, and make a terrible fuss over 'em when a child be going to be born.

GAY. Ah! The heathen know a bit! Even they cannibals have got their proper feelings seemingly. I'd be only too thankful to go to bed this minute; but 'twould be told against me. I heard you was back, Elias Waycott. Excuse me if I walk up and down. 'Tis a fearful strain—especially when you think that five thousand die of it every year.

HESTER. I was going over to Mrs. Gay presently.

GAY. She can't see you now. She can't see anyone.

Mrs. Tippets is along with her—far too hopeful that woman.

PHILIP. [*Giving* GAY *a drink.*] Here, sup this off and take another, master. You want a drop of courage.

GAY. If there'd been time, I'd have sent for a second doctor—one who knows what it is to be a father himself. These bachelor men haven't been through the hell of it, or they wouldn't——

ELIAS. Keep your nerve, Mr. Gay. After all 'tis your own fault. No man need enter into matrimony if they be faint-hearted about childer. 'Tis the men decide what women shall be mothers, not the women —eh, Hester?

HESTER. [*Laughing.*] And the women only too glad of the chance as a rule. Most of us wait, like apples on the bough, and hope for the hand to come and pluck us afore we grow over-ripe.

GAY. That's what I say. The dark deed is ours every time; and so the remorse falls on our shoulders.

PHILIP. Remorse! What ugly stuff be that? A scarecrow to fright fools, I reckon. You wait till you've got a brave babby yowling the roof off your house! Then you'll feel ten year younger and hungry for a dozen of 'em. Here's luck and a fine young butcher afore morning! [*Drinks.*

GAY. As to that, if 'tis a boy, he'll be certain sure to want to go to sea. My wife's people be all sailors, and the child takes after the mother.

HESTER. Perhaps 'twill be a little maid.

GAY. I hope so—she couldn't go to sea. I'd dote on a daughter; but I'm not one of the lucky ones.

ELIAS. You mustn't say that, or good luck will leave you.

GAY. 'Tis you be fortunate, Elias Waycott. Not a chick nor child—not a care. Just yourself to mind, and your houses and lands. They can't get in the family-way, like wives, or turn round and smite you and break your heart, like childer. 'Tis a most blessed state to be complete in yourself, with nought to do but count your money.

ELIAS. Who's so strong that he can stand alone?

GAY. You are. You're somebody now in the eyes of other people.

ELIAS. And still the same man in my own.

PHILIP. Get a fine wife then. There's nought like a loving woman to give you a better conceit of yourself.

GAY. They don't always. Sometimes they'll tell you the bitter truth about your character, morning, noon and night—especially night. At such times they'll flay you alive with their tongues and you wake up raw as a rib o' beef in the morning.

PHILIP. No doubt. 'Tis just a bit of luck whether a wife makes an angel or a devil of a man.

HESTER. Or he makes an angel or a devil of her.

PHILIP. But you'll find the right sort, Elias.

ELIAS. Nay, nay. I've got a lot of kind friends—that's enough for me.

HESTER. Kindness made alive you are yourself.

PHILIP. But don't be too soft, Elias; don't be too soft with the people.

GAY. Charity's one of the greatest blessings of the rich. 'Tis in their reach every hour of the day.

ELIAS. I've thought a lot upon it. The rich folk be a bit blind there in my opinion. They take the wrong-headed view and put money afore men. 'Tis the rights of man, not the rights of money, us have to consider. They can count up the figures in their cash books; but they can't count up the number of the rich and subtract it from the number of the poor.

PHILIP. Ah! That's a sum the poor do very clever for themselves nowadays.

GAY. No doubt we be putting some sharp questions against the arithmetic of the rich. The meek was promised the earth and they begin to think 'tis time they had it.

ELIAS. The rich don't know they're born, neighbours; but that's the first thing the poor find out. [*Rising.*

PHILIP. Money's power, however; and 'tis a poor creature don't glory in power. Haven't Mr. Gay here been generous and sporting and given me a bit in the business, and don't me and my wife go an inch taller for it? Ban't the money only—'tis the power.

GAY. I do my little bit to help make the world go round, and I always shall. In fact I do to others as I hope and trust the Lord will do to me.

ELIAS. And you'll get your goodness back with interest, be sure.

HESTER. You may have got it when you go home. Like enough there'll be a beautiful babby waiting for your arms.

GAY. God grant I don't drop him, for 'twill be sure to give me a great spasm when I touch the little creature. And don't you kill John Lake's pig to-morrow morning, Phil, for it bides within fifty yards of our house, and if my Eliza be still living, she'd never stand the noise.

ELIAS. I'll see you home, Willes Gay. [*They pick up their hats and put on their coats.* PHILIP *and* HESTER *help them to do so and shake hands with* ELIAS.]

GAY. Good night—good night—Please the Lord 'tis the last time I shall see the moon as a childless man. [*To* ELIAS.] I'm as brave a human as any other human and a very steadfast-minded Christian in the affairs of my neighbours. I've got the faith that moves mountains—for other people; but there 'tis—figures—they be such cold, dreadful monsters. And when you know that every year five thousand——

[*Exeunt* GAY *and* ELIAS WAYCOTT. PHILIP *shuts the door on them.*

HESTER. Poor, dear chap. He ban't very happy, I'm fearing.

PHILIP. Elias? He'll be all right. 'Tis only the strangeness. Lucky in life—unlucky in love.

HESTER. [*Putting her arms round his neck.*] Money be cold comfort against love, Phil.

PHILIP. Yes—for the likes of Elias.

HESTER. We'll be true friends to him if he'll let us.

PHILIP. I'm wonder-struck that he can bear to bide within sight of you. 'Tis a shape of love I don't understand. I couldn't have done that if you'd chucked me. I'd have fled t'other side of the world if you'd said "no" to me, Hester. Or maybe gone out of the world altogether. But Elias—though his life haven't got no salt for him, yet he'd never have the manhood to take leave of it. He ban't built to feel very cruel deep about his life, I reckon. It only puzzles him. He'll wander on in his gentle, easy way, and do his duty and feel no more happy nor sad about it than the river. He'd have loved you very dear; but not so grand and fiery as I love you, Hester.

HESTER. You don't love me grander than I love you, Phil. I hang on you for every joy and delight. I'd give my life for you if need was. I wake every morning and wonder such a man lives—and all for me. Oh Phil—I'm selfish: I can't look outside our own hearts.

PHILIP. How should you? Our all be there I reckon. Let the sad people go round the world; here's world enough for me. [*A knock at the door.*

HESTER. [*Leaving him.*] 'Tis Mr. Gay with his news. [*Opens the door.*] No, 'tisn't.

Enter THOMAS TURTLE.

PHILIP. Why, postmaster! Who'd dream to see you at this time o' night?

TURTLE. Nobody; and yet don't think it happened

by chance. Chance ain't allowed to play monkey tricks with a man like me, Philip Blanchard. I have just met Elias Waycott, and he sends a message to you.

PHILIP. He's left us but five minutes.

TURTLE. True. And yet what God can do in five minutes! He sent me, because he couldn't come back himself. Perhaps he never will.

HESTER. Good gracious! Why not, Mr. Turtle?

TURTLE. Ah, there lies the wonder! A dark and fearful thing has happened—perhaps the most fearful thing that I can call to mind for thirty years in this village.

HESTER. My goodness, postmaster, what be you saying?

PHILIP. If he's in trouble I'll——

[*Preparing to go.*

TURTLE. Stop where you are. He is in trouble, but none that his friends can save him from. He is beyond the reach of friend or enemy now. He is in the Hands of his Maker. The arm of the Law be on him. In a word, the man has just been took up by the police for the murder of his uncle six months ago.

HESTER. Elias! Elias kill a man!

TURTLE. I've got the power of speech, thank God; so if you'll listen to me you'll understand. First, I must tell you the body of old Waycott was found yesterday in Cann Woods. That rascal, Saul Coaker, the poacher, was the one that found it—ferreted it out somehow, though 'twas in a pit far deeper than a churchyard

grave. Down to the bottom of an old mine hole; hid under a ton of brush and stones, was Jacob Waycott. And in my far-seeing way, the first thing I thought when I heard it was how strange for Saul Coaker to take Elias's fifty pound reward with one hand and put Elias in prison with the other! So God works.

HESTER. But surely, surely——

TURTLE. Let me flow on—else you'll miss the tale. Of course Coaker was poaching; but as I've pointed out before to-day, Providence often uses a bad man to do its dirty work. And the lesser crime be nothing against the greater. First, the rascal, looking after his traps a month ago, found old Waycott's far-famed black hat, the like of which no man ever saw afore or since. 'Twas deep hid in a thorn bush; and with that he began his secret search. Night after night he hunted, for he reckoned, with a good deal of sense for such a man, that where Jacob Waycott's hat was, his head wouldn't be far off. And in the Lord's good time the corpse was found stowed safe and deep, with his skull broke in.

HESTER. But why for Elias?

TURTLE. It points to him. He and his old uncle were out, as we all know, and Jacob was heard to threaten Elias and swear to alter his will the very day before he disappeared. And so Elias had everything to gain by cutting him short. And then he was the gamekeeper in those very woods, and knew every hole and corner, and had a right to be there. And he was there that identical day,

and never denied it at the time. But I heard him vow to God afore the policeman just now that he was innocent of the crime, for I was passing at the moment and heard all. And he begged me to step in here, afore you went to bed, and break the harsh news.

HESTER. 'Tis madness! Who on earth could dream murder against such as him?

TURTLE. That's where the Law soars above us, Mrs. Blanchard, like a hawk above a sparrow. We may think he's innocent, and say we know him and know that he couldn't do any such desperate deed. But the Law don't know him, and don't want to know him. The Law's no respecter of persons. He'll be called to stand his fair trial before the face of the Lion and Unicorn, like everybody else. And we shall bulk large in the nation's eye, and be the corner-stone of the newspapers for a time. But don't deceive yourselves, 'twill only be for a time; though while it lasts I hope every one of us will take it in a proper spirit, as I shall.

HESTER. He wanted us to know.

TURTLE. And I was there—sent by the Almighty to gather his message. I'd gone to the chemist's, to get a bottle of liniment for my daughter's rheumatism. Meek as Moses the man went. They'll lock him up at the station to-night, and take him afore the magistrate to-morrow. And then, all in good time, he'll be haled off to the assizes at Exeter. As like as not they'll want evidence of character, and I may

be called to the witness-box myself. We must leave him to his Maker and his Judge; but there's no just reason why we shouldn't pray for him, until he's proved guilty. We must all keep our heads. The coroner sits to-morrow, and the funeral will bring the people like flies to a cookshop. Good night; I must be moving here and there. A great deal will be expected from me and, God willing, I shall rise to it.

[HESTER *opens the door for him and he goes out.* PHILIP *sits beside the table, where he has sat since* MR. TURTLE *entered.*

HESTER. What an awful, wicked thing! Be the people mad? To think that kindly creature—all goodness—such a man to—— Phil—why be you so silent? You don't fear for him?

PHILIP. For hate he done it. No man ever works so hard for love as he will for hate.

HESTER. Elias!

PHILIP. "Elias"! No. Saul Coaker. He swore he'd be quits with the keeper, if he had to wait till they was both in hell for it. And he kept his wrath warm—eh? To nose old Jacob out! Why, the foxes could never have found him. Buried under a proper mountain of dirt he was.

HESTER. What do you mean?

PHILIP. One foot in the grave had Jacob Waycott, and he didn't care who he kicked with t'other. But he kicked once too often. 'Tis a good yarn for a winter night. Draw near the fire and drink a drop out of my glass.

HESTER. You knew about it?

PHILIP. Who better? He fixed the meeting place himself. He wanted to hear all I knew about the old mine, because my mother's father had been captain of it fifty year back. He had ideas to set it going again, if he could find fools enough to float it. And when he axed me to tell him all I knew, I thought he was coming round and meant to be friendly. We met on the quiet and he heard all I could tell him. But then I came to my own affairs and he stung like an adder, and cursed my dead father and said I should have my teeth set on edge with his sour grapes. He goaded me to rage, Hester, and I lost myself and swung my stick and hit him down. Just one crack I gave him and no more. But it done the trick. A man that fells bullocks be bound to hit hard.

HESTER. You! Phil—Phil!

[*Puts her arms round him.*

PHILIP. I didn't care if I swung for him then. I left the woods and went home. But, come the dark, my mind changed. I thought on you and grew wild to live. I couldn't be sure the dog was really dead, so I rayed myself and rose and went to see. A moony night and I had all the place to myself. If I'd met Elias then! But I didn't. And there was Jacob, dead as a hammer, and his old pony standing beside him, waiting for him to get up. So I made a clean job, as you've heard. I blindfolded the pony and led it over Cann Quarry Cliff; and then I went down and took the bandage off its eyes. 'Tis strange

I never thought on the old devil's hat. And now a bit of rotten felt be going to—— Not a shadow haunted me, Hester, and never has. I went back home along and slept as sound as a saint. For I'd done a rare useful thing, you see, and hoped to be richly rewarded for it. I only thought how much sweeter the world would be without that damned rogue in it. 'Twas no more to me than sticking a pig. My business be killing things, ban't it? And next morning my only thought was you, and my only wonder I hadn't seen that way out afore. Not in cold blood could I have killed the man—I don't say that; but I was properly thankful it had come to me in hot. A savage tale—eh? Cuddle close to me; you'm shivering like a leaf.

HESTER. Oh, my God! What's life done to us?

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I: *The same as in Act II. The blinds of the window are up. The fire is out.* HESTER, *anxious and worn, sits intently reading a newspaper.* MRS. DUNNYBRIG *enters. She has a shawl over her head.*

HESTER. You be come?

SARAH. I couldn't bide no longer. What is it?

HESTER. The verdict ain't out, mother.

SARAH. Is Phil back?

HESTER. He'll be home first thing this morning.

SARAH. Did they let him see Elias?

HESTER. Us shall know all when he comes back—all but the verdict and sentence. They won't be out till noon.

SARAH. How do it read in cold print?

HESTER. The judge is dreadfully against him. Couldn't he look into the man's eyes and see truth in 'em?

SARAH. 'Tis said that justice be blind. It have got ears, but no eyes.

HESTER. And no heart, seemingly.

SARAH. There's one blessing, however. He wasn't

called to wait long. They took him just afore the Assizes. But it have been long enough to turn his hair grey, I'll warrant—such a nervous man as him. 'Tis so easy to say "not guilty" and so hard to prove it. But that cuts both ways. They can't prove he done it, any more than he can prove he didn't.

[*A knock. Enter* WILLES GAY *in his white butcher's jacket and apron, with a steel at his girdle.*

GAY. Morning, ladies—be Phil home?

HESTER. I've had a postcard with a picture of Exeter gaol upon it. He'll be back early. I expect him any minute.

GAY. 'Twill be a great blessing to business when we can all settle down again, and Elias be set free, and my son vaccinated. There's something always hanging over human creatures. We've never got a clean sky above us. No doubt we'd be the first to grumble at the sun if we had. The verdict will be out afore dinner and the sentence atop of it. We shall hear the best or worst afore the shadow's off the east side of the church tower.

SARAH. 'Twas very good of you to let Phil go.

GAY. The doomed man wanted to see him, and who be I to stand in the way of such a summons? "Doomed" I call him, but 'tis too strong a word. We be leaving out the jury. Yet mercy's a thing far stronger in one heart than in eleven. What one man would shrink from, eleven men will stand to without a pang.

HESTER. The judge didn't shrink. He stings like a whip. He don't believe that Elias is innocent.

GAY. Did Phil see him?

HESTER. Yes, along with the lawyer. 'Twas allowed afore the trial.

SARAH. Please God he put heart into him.

HESTER. Like the Trump on the Last Day it is to read the judge.

GAY. Yet I find myself full of hope, and the darker the people feel the more I tell them that all is going to be right. He's an innocent man, and I don't care who hears me say so.

SARAH. If only you'd been on the jury!

GAY. I can't say as to that. A jury breeds its own bad spirit. You start out as bold as brass and ready to withstand the pack of 'em, and you're all on the side of the prisoner and mad against society for banding against a poor, solitary wretch as can't defend himself, and so on; and then, little by little, you feel yourself ceasing to be yourself, and you get dull and savage and baffled among such a lot of ins and outs, till at last you're sick of human nature and not a man no more, but just a wheel, or a handle, or a bit of machinery running with the rest. I know, because I've been called to it.

[HESTER *goes to window and looks out.*

SARAH. How's the babby this morning?

GAY. The doctor says 'tis better; but I tell my wife not to hope.

SARAH. What nonsense! 'Tis tempting Providence.

GAY. Sometimes I wonder how Providence will have the face to meet me when the day comes—to say it civilly. My life be all obstacles, and though I plough through 'em and keep a smiling face, the strain be fearful.

SARAH. Your missis have made a good recovery—that's something.

GAY. So they say; but I don't know. 'Tis the way to put off husbands with words. For my part I see a change in her.

SARAH. Never!

GAY. I do. 'Tis idle to deny that she gives her first thought to the child.

SARAH. You don't grudge the babby that?

GAY. 'Tis the thin edge of the wedge. He's a masterful nipper with a will of iron, and he'll come to be everything to her, if he's spared. Then I shall be so good as a widower. She undervalues my part in him and what I went through. You'd think, to hear her, that she'd done it single-handed, and all my credit and fame in the matter goes for nought. When I remind her of that terrible evening, she's right down contemptuous of my share. And the child as like me as two peas and all! [*To* HESTER.] Be you coming to her this morning? She's wishful to see you.

HESTER. After Phil gets back.

GAY. You'll find him changed, remember. You

can't hear justice done in a court of law without changing. 'Tis a damping thing at best, and the old Adam in a man always shivers afore it. For 'tis whispered to us that it may be our turn next. Justice be the most unexpected thing in the world—full of surprises and a great shock to human nature. 'Tis like the bullock's hoof that goes into a lark's nest, or the cartwheel that runs over the mole in the dark. You'd be sorry for the bird and beast, but who's to blame? Nobody. Justice be built on justice. 'Tis only the Almighty can break His own laws—not us worms. [HESTER *lights the fire.*

SARAH. He's in the hands of God and so all's said.

GAY. Not all. God helps those who help themselves, and Elias haven't fought a very hard fight in my opinion.

SARAH. What more could he do than say he wasn't guilty?

GAY. They all say that. The Law must have something to work on. The majesty of the Law falls to the ground if a prisoner pleads "guilty." 'Tis like a busy man with his tools and cleverness coming to his work betimes and finding it done for him. The Law's very large-minded, remember. With all its faults, 'tis a very large-minded contrivance and always gives us the benefit of the doubt. The judge rubbed that into the jury.

HESTER. There was no doubt in his mind and he showed it.

GAY. Don't take the job to heart. I be positive

certain the man's going to get off. I wish I was so sure of my bad debts as I am about Elias. Yes, we'll all be standing him free drinks to-morrow. So cheer up and come over to my wife so soon as you can.

[*Exit* WILLES GAY.

SARAH. Don't you fret no more, else people will wonder why you be taking it so hardly. The butcher's right. He'll be free to come back to his friends before long. Perhaps he is a'ready. We must all try to make it up to him.

HESTER. "Make it up to him!"

SARAH. Help him to forget what it feels like to be on your trial for murdering a man. 'Tis surely a dreadful thing if one's witty enough to picture it. No doubt such a clever creature as you can see with his eyes; and that's why you be so terrible down. But you must hide your feelings, else your husband won't like it. Phil will come home afore long, then you'll be better. And you mustn't take on, whatever happens! 'tis bad for you. [*Exit* SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

[HESTER *tends the fire and sits crouched over it. Then she reads the paper again.*

Enter SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

SARAH. Here's Phil coming down the road from the station. [*Exit* SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

[HESTER *hurries to the door, then she hastens out. In a few moments she returns with* PHILIP. *He is in his best clothes and carries a carpet bag.*

HESTER. Thank God, you're back! 'Tis a hundred years since you went. And I've had to hide my heart and put a bold face on life and—and——

PHILIP. [*Caressing her*]. There—there! Steady! "A bold face on life" is a very good word. Be you well? You look sadly.

HESTER. I'm all right now you're back. 'Tis only the nights was so dreadful. I've cried out for daylight to come and been frightened to sleep for dreaming.

PHILIP. This won't do. You're finger-cold and white as curds.

HESTER. How is it to be?

PHILIP. Not a word till I've got you warm again—warm and happy, both.

HESTER. I shall be all right now you're home.

PHILIP. So you will then. That's the way—smile now—just a little one. Ha, ha, that's my girl! Fetch a drop of liquor—spirits—'twill do you good so well as me. Then I'll tell what's to tell.

HESTER. Don't you go away, I can't let you out of my sight no more. [*Exit* HESTER.

[*When she has left the room* PHILIP BLANCHARD'S *forced animation dies. His face assumes a deeply troubled look. He takes off his hat and coat and warms his hands at the fire. He is staring before him lost in thought, when his wife returns with a bottle and a tumbler, and a jug of water on a tray. He pours out spirits, adds water and makes her drink. Then he*

pours more spirits to what she leaves and drinks himself.

HESTER. Tell me truth—everything.

PHILIP. I be going to do it. Come here on my lap—so close as you can get.

HESTER. 'Tis heaven to see you again. I couldn't have bided a day longer without 'e. I was growing old.

[*She sits on his lap and puts her arms round his neck.*

PHILIP. We ban't the sort to grow old, I reckon. We've had a good time—a brave time.

HESTER. And be going to for years and years.

PHILIP. You can't keep at high-water-mark for ever. The tide will turn. Maybe the happiest be them that don't turn with it and end on the flood.

HESTER. Tell it out—Elias?

PHILIP. What a world—eh? An old felt hat from a bramble bush—and all the devils in hell couldn't have thought on a better plan. Coaker found it by chance and put two and two together, fired by his long hate of Elias. And he got to the old boy's bones after six weeks' searching. I lay Jacob Waycott be laughing in hell if he knows about it, for the best laugh be the last.

HESTER. Don't talk that way or you'll drive me mad.

PHILIP. I'll begin at the beginning. And the beginning was afore I went to see Elias. 'Twas in my mind when I left you three days agone—a great

amazement about you, Hester. To think that you—for love—could take what I'd done so light, and never turn against me, and never——

HESTER. [*Impatiently.*] That's child's talk. We be far past that. Ban't you and me one—body and soul? Your work's my work. I'm *you*—so much as your right arm be you.

PHILIP. Ah! You wonder! and well I know it. But I wish you wasn't screwed so tight into my life—for if——

HESTER. We be one creature, I tell you—close, close as the handle to the hatchet and the rind to the apple.

PHILIP. A bitter rind to your sweet fruit. But I love to hear you say so. There—light down off my lap and let me move about and tell all.

[*Kisses her and rises. She sits on the arm of the chair and keeps her eyes steadily on his face as he walks backwards and forwards.*

PHILIP. The lawyer's a good chap. When he understood that I was a great friend of Elias and must see him, he planned it, and got the warders out o' ear-shot, and I had very near ten minutes with him. They prison warders be kindly men. Elias have won 'em over, so they'd do anything for him they could.

HESTER. For sure.

PHILIP. I soon had it out and told him he was safe and lifted the load from his mind. 'Twas like coming back to life by a short cut for him, and you'd have thought I should hear him heave a pretty good sigh

of relief, or else swear an oath of thankfulness. But he only stared at me all in a miz-maze of wonder. I didn't waste no words after I told him 'twas I killed the old man. I said, "Life's terrible good to me and Hester, Elias, and knowing what a game hero you be, I've come to ax you to do us a mighty service, if you feel you can rise to it." "Be sure I will, if 'tis in my power," he said, "for Hester's sake if not for yours." He see'd, with his lightning-quick mind, that this was worse for you than me. And then I put it to him if he would stand the trial afore the nation. "'Tis any odds you'll be proved not guilty," I said to the man, "and then no harm be done, and we go on as before, and I'll pay you for your goodness after, if it takes me my lifetime, for 'twould mean salvation to me and my wife. But if it goes wrong, then you needn't turn a hair, for the very next minute, the truth will be out and you'll be cleared afore the world."

HESTER. He understood?

PHILIP. He understood and he rose to it. He rose to trusting me. We reckoned him weak and easy. But think—think of the pluck o' trusting me! Took my word after he knowed all the truth. There's bravery! Some might say 'twas foolhardy.

HESTER. Not Elias. He knows you. You put him at peace then?

PHILIP. I did, and he wanted for me to be at peace and—and you also. His first thought was you, Hester. "Tell her to fear nothing," he said. "Afore all things don't let her fret." He was very hopeful

that it would be all right. The torture of being locked up hadn't served him as it would have served me. Yet, when the trial happened a bit later, and I saw him again, he'd altered somehow and you could feel the thing had bitten into him. He knew himself safe, but there 'twas—you can't come through such a fire without getting scorched a bit. I'd die a thousand deaths rather than stand in a dock.

HESTER. Then the trial?

PHILIP. It began all right. A very clever chap, with a rare gift of the gab, stood for Elias and dwelt on his good character and all that. He bluffed and said 'twas a common scandal that Elias should have been arrested at all; and I believe, if us could have stopped there, the jury would have said "not guilty" and turned him free without leaving the box. But the Law have a dreadful way of grinding on and on, like a machine, till it fogs your understanding and leaves a common man with all the milk of human kindness dried up in him. The friendly feeling for Elias faded away presently.

HESTER. Don't say that.

PHILIP. It died out. The judge was against him. A cold man with a hatchet face, like a Red Indian. He didn't understand nothing about Elias and his fine nature, and he didn't care nothing neither. He just stood for the Law and hadn't any more heart in him than a thunderbolt. I was very near dancing with wrath when he was a summing up—all so deadly true outside and so deadly false inside. I could have

yelled at him and told him he was a liar. Yet all the time you felt the jury was bound to believe that frosty voice. 'Twas like a talking statue. Only the light in his eyes showed he was alive. [*He points to the newspaper.*] Them as read that speech this morning and know not Elias—they'll say, "He's a doomed man—and deserves it."

HESTER. Philip, Philip—for God's sake don't. I'm terrible feared.

PHILIP. Circumstantial evidence—'tis called. And the funny thing was Elias. Yes—if you'd looked at him, you'd have sworn 'twas all real to him and that he thought his life hung in the balance. If he'd been guilty, he couldn't have listened to the judge's words more dreadful keen. Alert and alive to every syllable. Licking his dry lips wet, again and again, and staring as if them dark eyes of his would bolt out of his head! In another man, that knew what he knew, you'd have said 'twas play acting; but not in him. He was terrified, if ever man was terrified. A great mystery that.

HESTER. No mystery. Oh, can't you see? Can't you feel it? 'Twas you being tried, not him; 'twas your life hanging on a hair, not his; 'twas you to go free or—or— He knew. Put your arms round me for God's love. Don't tramp no more. How be we going to live till 'tis known.

PHILIP. [*Standing still.*] Lord, you clever woman! I never thought of that. [*Goes to her.*] Why, of course —a tender chap like him—he was feeling it for me,

and feeling it so much as me—more—more than me! Don't fret your soul to fiddlestrings afore you're called to. Phew—'tis a beastly thing to be in the hands of your fellow-men—like he is. I won't go through that. If it's got to be, I——

HESTER. Keep off it! Don't whisper it!

PHILIP. Not I. I ban't going to take that dose, my pretty bird. There's plenty of sweeter physic than that.

HESTER. You mean——?

PHILIP. I mean nought—not yet. A thousand things may fall out. But if that falls out, then 'tis for you and me to——

HESTER. I won't think no more—I can't think no more. I'm worn out—my eyes be shutting. I only want to sleep for ever in your arms, Phil.

PHILIP. So you shall, then. And hope—hope about it. We be born to hope, you and me. This be only a dream, and we'll waken presently. I cling to life with all my seven senses—'tis such a damned fine thing. We must live "double tides," as the sailors watch—every minute—every second!

HESTER. I've been on my knees praying to God all night for you, Phil.

PHILIP. That's to the good, for if a watchful God there be, then 'tis certain He wanted that hard old villain took off. And He chose me to do it, and put the fire in me to smite him down. I was driven to do it, weren't I? And be I going to yelp out that I've done wrong, because I've obeyed my Maker and

lifted my whip and smote a bad man, when the Lord woke a great rage in my heart? Ban't the Bible full of such things? I'd have been a coward to stand his scorpion tongue more; and I'd have been a fool to blab after. I'll go down to the shop now.

HESTER. No, no, I can't let you out of my sight no more to-day. I've got a dreadful fear——

PHILIP. That's not my Hester. You mustn't feel like that. You must feel same as I do and rise above little things. This be a big thing, and if it goes wrong, we've got to tackle it big. Us have got to say, we've had a good time and we thought there was more coming; but there wasn't. We've had it all. And 'twas full measure. We've loved more and took more joy of each other in six months than some poor creatures could have squeezed out of a lifetime. [*She puts her hands on his shoulders.*] Them precious hands! They'd keep it away if they could; but the world's up in arms now. 'Tis in a nutshell. If Elias be let free, we're all right; if he's not, we're all wrong, and there's an end of it.

HESTER. Don't say it. There's a thousand ways—I've thought of a thousand ways.

PHILIP. Not for me, my life—only one way for the likes of me. [*A knock.*] There's postmaster. I called and he promised to come along the minute 'twas flashed from London.

[HESTER *sinks into chair by the fireplace.*
PHILIP *goes to the door.*

PHILIP. [*At door.*] Buck up—tighten your chin.

Show your pluck—you'll never get a better chance to! [*He opens the door.*] Come in, Mr. Turtle, and thank you for coming.

Enter THOMAS TURTLE.

TURTLE. A regular procession of one, you might call it. The folk knew I'd got the news, and when I set forth, they streamed after me, like sheep after the shepherd.

PHILIP. Out with it, man!

TURTLE. The Law's made good in the eyes of the people.

PHILIP. And what have it come to?

TURTLE. We thought he hadn't done it, being that mild-mannered and civil-spoken; but such things lie only skin deep, and the eagle eye of the Law have seen through and through him.

PHILIP. Guilty?

TURTLE. Guilty, and the full, fearful penalty to pay.

PHILIP. Innocent as light!

TURTLE. You mustn't say that—'tis a very dangerous thing to question the Law, Blanchard, and I warn you against it. A cowardly, cruel murder—to slay an ancient man, weak in the hams and seventy-five years old. And to hide him, so that he shouldn't have Christian burial—'twas an outrage against God and man both.

PHILIP. He's to swing for it?

TURTLE. Death's the dreadful word—to be hung by the neck in Exeter gaol. Struck down with his

stolen food in his mouth and his stolen money in his pocket. And he thought he'd hoodwinked his Maker, no doubt, and laughed in his sleeve—poor fool—to think the creature cleverer than his Creator. 'Tis only the sinner finds God a puzzle, you must know. To me, for instance, His way be clear enough; and His way have been mine ever since I gave a blind man my first penny. And so right's done and we faithful ones know where to give the praise.

[*Exit* THOMAS TURTLE.

PHILIP. We're up against it, Hester.

[*A curtain falls for a few moments to rise again on the second scene.*

SCENE II: *Still the parlour of the Blanchards' cottage; the time is the hour before dawn. A candle burns low on the table and by the light of it* PHILIP BLANCHARD *sits writing laboriously. His coat and waistcoat are off; his collar is on the table. The right sleeve of his flannel shirt is turned up to the elbow, showing his great fore-arm. Many sheets of paper are scattered upon the table. Sleeping uneasily on the settle, by a low fire, lies* HESTER BLANCHARD.

PHILIP *scratches his head, sorts the papers, then squares his elbows and writes. He stops, reflects and writes again.* HESTER *moves and murmurs in her sleep. He listens to her.*

HESTER. Oh, Phil—you darling—always thinking of your girl! 'Tis much too fine for me. [*Laughs.*] I lay it cost a fortune!

[PHILIP *writes a few words.* HESTER *wakens and sits up. Her hair is down and the upper buttons of her bodice are unfastened.*

PHILIP. Sleep a bit longer. It ban't morning yet.

HESTER. Have I been asleep?

PHILIP. Like a top and little wonder. I've done my job. [*He gathers the papers together.*]

HESTER. To think I could sleep!

PHILIP. You was played out. See what a lot I've wrote. I'm a cat-handed, clumsy creature with a pen. A knife's my tool.

HESTER. This be waking to die.

PHILIP. I wish to God I'd never told you.

HESTER. Don't say that. Do 'e think I was only built to cuddle? We've been one in good and we'll be one in—this.

PHILIP. That's what I'd help if I could. But we love too close.

HESTER. Don't you feel different, now that you've cleared Elias afore all men? [*Pointing to the papers.*] Can't you see that to do this isn't to give yourself up?

PHILIP. No, by God—never.

HESTER. Then there's hope. I'll talk till Judgment Day if I can make you list to reason. This goes to lawyer [*pointing to papers*] and you disappear—where they'll never find you.

PHILIP. That's what I mean.

HESTER. 'Tis not what you mean. You mean to end it.

PHILIP. We needn't go back over that no more.

HESTER. To think I fell asleep! But I'm fresh now and full of fight again. Why end what's a good and blessed thing? Us talked about your life last night. Now we'll talk about mine.

PHILIP. Yours?

HESTER. As sure as God's in heaven. D'you think I'll live if you die? Can a body live with the heart taken out? But leave that. Be your own clever self, Phil. Why should you go out of it?

PHILIP. Where else can I go?

HESTER. The world's a big place, but there's time to get half across it. 'Tis given out you be called away on business. I'll invent a tale for master. Then, when you're safe, I give the writing to the lawyer. They can't hurt me. No wife's called to tell against her husband. And presently I steal off after you—and——

PHILIP. Know me better. To live like a hunted creature all my days! To feel there's hue and cry; to know that every strange man I meet may come to take me to—— Death's nought, but the fear of death be a thing that gets into the blood and poisons a man till his life's a living death. Do you want to watch me rotting under your eyes?

HESTER. You're not built to fear.

PHILIP. I know fear now; but not the fear of death.

'Tis what goes before—not what comes after. I've killed too many things to fear killing myself. But I won't be hunted to death. I'll go there at my own gait and by my own road. To doubt every eye that's fixed on me; to fear every door that opens; to dread every strange voice that axes for Philip Blanchard. No—no. You'd not drive me to that. I've lived a full life, thanks to you, and I'm not going to have it end in a mess. We've walked on the high road and we won't slink behind hedges. I've despised the people that live like sheep—the bleating herd of 'em—and be I to go at the mercy of the herd? They've got none. There's no more hard-hearted creature on earth than the herd when 'tis up in arms. There'll be judge and jury for me, too, like there was for Elias; and not one of the lot would be brave enough to pull the rope they'll give me—not one would rise to kill a man single-handed. But let 'em herd and they'll do it quick enough.

HESTER. Be patient. Don't get out of hand with yourself.

PHILIP. Help me then; don't hinder me. Show what a big, strong woman you be. I'm hungering to end it—quick—quick. I never was a patient man in body or soul. When a thing's to do; I fret till it's done.

[*The candle goes out. Light has already begun to wax behind the blind.* PHILIP *walks to the window, draws up the blind and throws open the casement. A dim, clear dawn is*

revealed, and there is the sound of a lark shrilling aloft.

PHILIP. The larks be in the sky. 'Tis a brave morning.

HESTER. You don't fear death, but a shadow. A shadow you fear. Who'll look for you? Who'll care?

PHILIP. The Law will care. What's nobody's business be everybody's business when a man kills a man. The framework of the earth shakes nowadays when a man kills a man, because life be growed so beastly precious in these cowardly times. The herd shivers if one of 'em drops, and turns frightened eyes to seek the tiger, and calls upon the unsleeping, unresting Law.

HESTER. Then come back to me and forget yourself for a bit. Be I nothing? Don't I count?

PHILIP. 'Tis only you that do count. I've thought this out—to the dregs. I've left no stone unturned. Suppose I ran—there's a shadow of danger for Elias still.

HESTER. Not when they've read what you've wrote.

PHILIP. Why should they believe me? They know I'm his friend. The Law might say, "This be a trick. This man have took the blame and fled—for love of the sinner." And Elias would gain nought.

HESTER. That holds the same if you was to give yourself up.

PHILIP. True enough; but not if I do what I'm going to do. If I die, they won't hang Elias.

HESTER. D'you want to die? Me—me—think of me! Be that man or any man more than me? Ban't I first? Ban't your unborn child first? Do 'e mean us to go down to the grave too.

PHILIP. Hush—that ain't my fighting Hester.

HESTER. Oh life—our life! You can't end it—you can't cut it off?

PHILIP. Bear up, and don't make it look bigger than it is. No physic's so nasty you don't forget the taste between doses. You must live, because in honour you can't die; but I must die because in honour I can't live.

HESTER. You put your honour afore me?

PHILIP. I put your own honour and your child's honour afore you. Cheer up—here's mother coming along.

HESTER. Be there no other way?

PHILIP. Christ knows that I'd take it if there was. There's no other. There! That's the look I love to see in your eyes! That's my girl!

Enter SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

PHILIP. Morning, mother. You'm travelling abroad early this morning.

SARAH. Morning, my dears. Not a wink did I sleep. And I know you be the same.

PHILIP. Bide and have breakfast along with Hester.

SARAH. 'Twas my thought. I don't feel as if I could open the shop to-day.

PHILIP. [*Laughing.*] Shops can't shut because we be going to hang the wrong man. That minds me; I've got to kill a sheep before breakfast. [*Puts on his coat.*] I'll be back presently.

HESTER. [*Aside to* PHILIP.] You don't mean—swear afore God this ban't the end. Swear you'll come back alive to me. There's got to be "Good-bye." [PHILIP *hesitates.*

HESTER. Swear it, or I'll die too—that instant moment.

PHILIP. I thought may be——

HESTER. Swear it.

PHILIP. I will then. You're right. I swear to you I'll come back to say "Good-bye." You and me be strong things. A clean cut is soonest healed. We'll part clean, not ragged. [*Exit* PHILIP.

SARAH. I ain't slept a wink for thinking on this dreadful thing. I heard voices last night. I could have sworn Elias was talking down under in the shop.

HESTER. 'Tis a very fearful come-along-of-it.

SARAH. I'll never trust a human again. Not man nor woman will I trust. If that man wasn't good, then there's no goodness in anybody. The people be running about like a nest of ants. And to think he wanted to marry you and offered to do it! And I was that fretful because you wouldn't take him, and never saw the watching Lord in it! To wed a man with red hands!

HESTER. Be you like the rest? Don't you know him?

SARAH. No, I did not. None did. He hid his

proper self as only such dark and secret men can hide themselves. He was a mask to us and behind it the real, terrible creature moved and struck—like lightning from the cloud.

HESTER. Fool's talk, mother. He never did it.

SARAH. Who did then? But thank God 'tis not in our hands. You mustn't think of him no more. He's had justice, and 'tis all the best or worst have a right to ask for. 'Tis all that men can give to saint or sinner.

HESTER. And ban't mercy in man's reach too?

SARAH. Not afore spilled blood. We must do as God bade us, and take life for life as long as the Bible lasts. Life be the most sacred thing as God ever made, and He's terrible jealous of it. He gives and He takes away; but He won't suffer none else to meddle with it. Life and death be God's work.

HESTER. Oh mother, mother, if you but knew! But you—you with your Bible thoughts——Go, now. Don't you bide to breakfast. Us would rather be all alone this morning. 'Tis hitting us cruel hard.

SARAH. And well I know it. You sit still and let me get the food and comfort you. You be cold and weary-eyed. Your face be like an old woman's in the morning light. But don't let that vex Philip. Tell him 'tis always the way when a little one be drawing on us.

HESTER. Yes, yes. He knows. He thinks nought of it.

SARAH. And don't let him be frighted if he sees a grey hair or two. My family always went grey terrible

early. I was grey afore you was born. 'Tis only a harmless trick of nature. But he mustn't fret about it.

HESTER. Not he—he never troubles for things like that.

SARAH. A proper fine man, and I love him very well, for he understands me something wonderful.

HESTER. Yes, yes—so fond of you, as if you was his own mother.

SARAH. There's such a lot to thank God for, and not a cloud without a silver lining. I was thinking last night what a lucky thing it is that Elias have got no father and mother to break their hearts and go mad for him. We thought when he was left an orphan, that it was a hard case; but little we knew what they were took from.

HESTER. For God's sake be gone, mother dear; I want to be alone.

SARAH. You're wrong. 'Tis a moment when you should have cheerful company. Till all be over and time rolling on again, you did ought to keep with friends, Hester. There may be more coming out presently. Elias will very like confess now. They often do when hope's dead, and the chaplain labouring day and night at 'em.

[*Exit* SARAH DUNNYBRIG.

[HESTER *collects* PHILIP'S *papers and puts them in a stamped envelope which lies on the table beside them. She moves restlessly about the room, then hears* PHILIP'S *voice answering* WILLES GAY. *She looks out of*

the window and leaves the room as PHILIP *and* GAY *enter it.*

GAY. She must come and see my wife, well or ill. I won't hear "no." A proper, brave creature is Hester——

PHILIP. Brave enough, but a bit under the weather for the minute.

GAY. Don't say that. You people ban't born to trouble. You deserve to be happy, and you are happy. 'Tis the very rare case of folk getting what they deserve. My Eliza finds the world a terribly difficult place since she became a wife and mother. And not the first. In a word, the baby's got a temper. He's going to be one of the fierce sort, I'm afraid. 'Tis a fatal thing nowadays to be born into the world if you're fierce, Philip.

PHILIP. So it is, then—fatal! No room for the fierce now. The race be all to the sheep, not the wolf.

GAY. Quite right too. Sheep be useful; wolves ban't. You've got to be useful to your fellow-man, else he won't be useful to you.

PHILIP. You may be useful to him and he's too big a fool to see it. The strong get no thanks—slander and envy be their portion. The world hates 'em.

GAY. The thing is to keep in with all men and take good care not to let your head rise above the level of the rest.

PHILIP. Aye, chew grass and bleat like the others, and they'll let you bide. But if you growl a bit, they'll soon band together against you.

GAY. Nobody ever heard me growl—nor my Eliza either. Live and let live be our motto, and yet—our son be born fierce! 'Tis as if the hedge-sparrow's egg had hatched out a hawk. He'll take his mother's breast more like a young tiger sucking than a baptized Christian child; and if she keeps him waiting—my stars! we hear about it.

PHILIP. The world will tame him, if you can't.

GAY. The world's full of puzzles, Blanchard, and so like as not, though you and your Hester be the brave, fearless sort, to look the sun in the eyes without blinking, your child will be meek and gentle and full of grace.

[PHILIP *is moved. He holds his hand over his eyes a moment.*

PHILIP. Please God, 'twill be a good little man-child—built for his mother's peace and happiness.

[*Enter* HESTER *with a tray, on which are a tea-pot and plates, a loaf, and a piece of honey.* PHILIP *puts kettle on the fire.*

PHILIP. There's talk of a petition already, they say.

GAY. I'll sign it for one, and so will my wife. I believe he did it in a savage moment; but I don't hold with hanging—'tis too revengeful and calls for a man-butcher. To think of a person with an immortal soul, and made in the image of God, getting his living by stringing up his fellow creatures! It oughtn't to be allowed.

PHILIP. Baa, baa! That's the way the sheep

people talk. Then why do they send men to the gallows?

HESTER. At best, if he was spared, they'd give him penal servitude for life.

GAY. That's only twenty years.

PHILIP. Twenty years! Twenty hells! Who wants to rot afore he's dead? Who'd take life at that cost when he could be free—free as death?

GAY. Ah, my son, life be life to the worst of us.

PHILIP. I know there's many would creep through any dirt just to live. But not him. He ban't so sweet on living that he'd want to suffer it in a convict's jacket.

GAY. You'm a rash chap, Philip, and I'm feared of my life your opinions will spoil your happiness some day. Well, Mrs. Blanchard, you'll guess why I'm here. Eliza's down-daunted this morning. She dreamed of a rope last night, and our hard-hearted child be on her nerves worse than usual. So may I say you'll step over?

PHILIP. She'll try to do so soon as she can. But Elias—a very great friend——

GAY. There's nought soothes the woful mind like helping other people. I'll say you be coming to forget your trouble in ours. [*Exit* WILLES GAY.

HESTER. I can't live out of sight of you. My heart stops out of sight of you.

PHILIP. We're past all that. We're brave; we can look the sun in the face, as Gay said just now. The worst be over because we know the worst. I'm

just going up the goyle two mile off—the old roundy-poundy at Moor-edge, our first walk when we was tokened. I'm all right and cheerful you see.

HESTER. I can't fight no more for 'e.

PHILIP. Life's worse than death, sometimes. I know that your part's a mighty deal harder than mine. You're the brave one; you're the wonder. Perhaps I'd have said, "Come with me and see what 'tis like" but for—— No, no. Us can't both be murderers. 'Twould shake heaven up too much—eh, Hester?

HESTER. This is the end then?

PHILIP. No—the beginning, if what you believe holds true.

HESTER. What be you going to do?

PHILIP. Nought to name—just slip out of it easy and quick—I've got to go; but my little one have got to come. We've had a proper time—a grand time—and we didn't leave off in the midst, but at the end. 'Tis finished, full and over-flowing: alway remember that. You'll stumble on peace presently and live again in the babby—and so shall I. 'Tis rough on you, but you believe in another world. So this be only "Good-bye" till to-morrow. Try to see it like that. There's a God all right. I don't deny it no more. And you'll be His care now I be gone. He won't make 'e so happy as I have—twenty Gods couldn't; but 'tis up to Him to do His Almighty best.

HESTER. Phil—Phil—my beautiful, strong Phil!

To take your own life! A forbidden thing! Think of Christ!

PHILIP. Let Him think of me. He'll do to others as He'd be done by, Hester. I don't fear Him. Good-bye till to-morrow. 'Tis only to-morrow.

HESTER. Not yet—not yet.

PHILIP. Mind about the letter. So long, my own life!

HESTER. Not yet—Do 'e grudge a little minute out of eternity?

PHILIP. For honour mind—for honour. And Elias—you tell him about it, Hester. I'll lay he'll say some comforting things—a man built to comfort sad folks.

[HESTER *is now dazed and holds him by his coat as he moves about.*

HESTER. For honour—for honour.

PHILIP. That's my brave girl! I'd like to go here with your arms round me—by God I would! I'd like to shut my eyes on your blessed face; but that's beyond nature.

HESTER. For honour. No—no—don't kiss me yet—just a minute more.

PHILIP. A minute! We shall have millions and millions of years together with luck—eh? [*Kisses her.*] There! Mind that kiss and keep it warm till us run up against each other again somewhere. God be good to 'e, you brave, faithful woman, for you've done nought but love a —— The angels in heaven did ought to tumble over each other to comfort 'e.

[*Laughs.*] I'll tell 'em to come, if I get the chance. Good-bye, my dinky dear!

HESTER. Hold me close a minute more—just one minute!

PHILIP. There—there. Time's flying and he'll fly fast. Show your pluck. I mustn't be rough to 'e. 'Tis the last thing I'd——

[HESTER *clings to him and he moves her arms, gently.*

HESTER. Don't — don't — a second — a second — what's one second? I can't—I can't let 'e go—you shan't leave a woman that's loved like me—'tis cruel Phil—Phil—Oh Christ, hold him back—Oh, Jesus, spare him—spare him to me!

[*She faints and falls to the ground.*

PHILIP. Thank the Lord!

[*He puts a cushion under her head. Kisses her hand passionately and goes off.*

HESTER *slowly returns to consciousness and sits up on the floor. She stares round her. She hears the faint song of a bird.*

HESTER. The larks be in the sky and 'tis a brave morning. [*A knock. Enter* WILLES GAY.

GAY. Back again, like a bad penny! Excuse me—why, what's happened?

HESTER. [*Light-headed.*] The larks be in the sky and 'tis a brave morning, Mr. Gay.

GAY. So 'tis then; but where's Philip?

HESTER. Gone to work. Did he have his breakfast? I don't know.

GAY. Of course—a hungry man like him. Don't you sit there. 'Tisn't the place for you.

HESTER. I must have falled down, I reckon. There ain't no nature in me this morning. I'm cruel tired.

GAY. Let me lift you in the armchair. There. To think of you sick! 'Tis the shock about Elias!

HESTER. Your child's a proper little terror, Willes Gay; but Phil says the fighting sort make the finest men. He was that sort. He was—where is he? Where's my husband?

GAY. That's what I want to know.

HESTER. I've been dreaming. [*Rises up and sits down again.*] My legs are turned to water this morning. [*Puts her head in her hands.*] 'Tis a funny, fearful thing. Wait a minute—my brains be working again.

GAY. Us had better fetch a doctor to 'e if you're ill.

HESTER. I'm never ill. Strong as a pony and happy as a bird. But—but I was holding him tight and he said, "Show your pluck." Why for was I holding him tight?

GAY. Lord knows. You don't need to hold him, I reckon. Wild hosses wouldn't drag the man away from you.

HESTER. [*Suddenly cries out.*] He's gone! I'll never see him no more—the goyle—Reach me my sun-bonnet off that nail. He's there, because—— He wanted for my arms to be round him. Why not?

Why shouldn't a woman have her arms round her husband? Don't Eliza put her arms round you?

GAY. Not now the baby's come. 'Tis a cruel shame to lift the young above the old, like she do.

[*Gives* HESTER *her sun-bonnet.*

HESTER. To show my pluck—eh? A very fine deed to close his eyes. The last thing he'd know was my lips on his. I'd go too—I wanted to go; but he bade me stay in the world all alone with nought but a child for comfort. Cold comfort—eh?

GAY. Very cold comfort, indeed, in my opinion.

HESTER. How if I died first? Would he be terrible vexed to find me waiting for him? Or terrible happy? Life ain't much fun lived all alone, Mr. Gay?

GAY. So I thought once; but there's nothing like trying it along with other people to change your views.

HESTER. He chose the goyle for remembrance—a lonesome place, full of sweet grass nibbled down by the rabbits. The plover's nest in the bog up over. I'll go to him. And if God's got the heart to blame me, He ain't no God of love.

GAY. Here—here—this talk's all moonshine! Whatever is the matter, Hester? Don't tell me such a sensible pair be out? You haven't quarrelled with the man?

HESTER. When does the soul come into a child?

GAY. Be blessed if I know. But I can tell 'e when the devil do; and that's exactly five minutes after he's born.

HESTER. The soul's a deep question. A child can't perish if the soul be in him. Do it wait for the babe to be born?

GAY. A deep question sure enough.

HESTER. I say it don't. I say that a babby's got a soul from the moment a mother knows he's there. That's when his little heart begins to beat. He's somebody then. He may be no bigger than a tiny flower-bud; but he's somebody, and his soul be hid in the petals. You can't do him no harm after that. He's the Lord's business after that. [*Going.*] Don't you understand? 'Tis only bringing up in the next world instead of this one. 'Tis only making an angel of him instead of a man. I'm going to my husband, you must know. I see all very plain now, and I be so strong as a lion again. Don't fear I'll be a coward; I won't tempt him to turn back, nor nothing like that. I'll help him—he shan't flinch; I'll push him on. I'll do it for him if he likes. He don't know me yet! 'Tis two good mile to the goyle; but I'll run like a lapwing.

Enter THOMAS TURTLE.

TURTLE. Where's Philip Blanchard to?

HESTER. We can't tell that. We don't know where he is; but we know where he will be. How far is it to heaven, postmaster? You know everything. Tell me that.

GAY. She's light-headed.

TURTLE. Tis enough to make the nation light-

headed. I heard it first—all comes to me first. It travelled the telegraph wires at half-past six of the clock. And knowing what these folks felt about it, I just ate my breakfast and put on my hat and came. I'm right again, Willes Gay. [*Waves a telegram.*

GAY. Be you ever wrong?

TURTLE. No doubt I do wrong like us all; but 'tis a kind of rare and inner wrong-doing—so uncommon that 'tis hidden from all eyes—including my own. Only my Maker catches me at it, and I shall know where I made my mistakes when I go afore the throne, no doubt. Elias Waycott's the matter. He murdered his uncle, as I said. 'Tis all out now.

GAY. Confessed?

TURTLE. He has, if ever man did; but not in words. Deeds speak louder that words.

GAY. So they do, so they do. Nought teaches you that like a new-born child.

TURTLE. And he's done a dreadful deed of shame. Don't you go afore you hear the bitter truth, Mrs. Blanchard. The man's destroyed himself—Elias.

GAY. Good powers—killed hisself!

TURTLE. He has, and ended a crooked life with a crooked act.

[*A great change comes over* HESTER, *but the men do not observe it.*

TURTLE. 'Tis funny how often I'm right, and yet not funny neither when you think where I get my news from. They say in Little Silver that I walk arm-in-arm with the Almighty; and they don't mean

it for a compliment. Yet 'tis truer than the fools know.

[HESTER *has revealed that her mind is clearing. She becomes alive and alert. Now she goes off by the same door that* PHILIP *went; but the men do not observe that she has gone.*

GAY. Killed hisself? However did he do it? They watch 'em like a cat watches a mouse after they be sentenced to die.

TURTLE. Well you may ask that. 'Twas all of a piece, Willes Gay. The cunning of the serpent under the harmlessness of the dove. Be sure 'twas all thought out so soon as he heard his doom. You see he made great friends of the prison people before the trial, and the officers were deceived. A great power of deceit in that man. The warders thought no evil of him—they liked him and were sorry for him. And, yesterday night, when he sat writing his confessions, as murderers do, he asked a man who watched over him—quite innocent like—for a penknife to scratch out a word. And the man—he'll suffer for it and lose his job, and so he ought—he was deceived and saw nothing in the prisoner's deep question and never dreamed what he was after. A trick worthy of the devil, you might say. He took the penknife and began to scratch out, and then—afore t'other could lift a finger—swish! the dreadful wretch had dashed it in under his ear and cut a great vein as runs there! The doctor was sent for, but he

could do nought—the man was gone and his life-blood all run away.

GAY. [*Who has sat with open mouth listening to the story.*] Stars in heaven! To think of it—such a gentle creature!

TURTLE. The devil looks after his own, Butcher Gay, and for that matter, as I've often said, if he'd only look after his own and not torment the chosen, 'twould be a much more respectable world and a lot of good time saved.

GAY. To pile suicide on murder! And they was getting up a petition for his life a'ready.

TURTLE. They were. I know all about it. But man proposes and God disposes, and always have done since I can remember Him. And grim as a ghost will the Almighty look when Elias Waycott comes unbidden afore Him. You can blaze it abroad, Willes Gay, and you, Mrs. Blanchard——

[*Finds that* HESTER *is not there.*

GAY. Slipped off to tell her husband, no doubt. She's queer this morning—all over the shop—her brain reeling. Horror on horror for them. I hope it won't make no difference to her child.

TURTLE. Nothing happens afore it happens. 'Tis a great thought and I've often cheered a downcast sinner with it. We come and we go, and 'tis for a man like I am, who finds life as easy as A.B.C., to help them that make such a hash of it.

GAY. No doubt—no doubt. But the day won't stand still along of these dreadful things.

TURTLE. There's room for all in a well-regulated mind. We must have good and bad; and when you get the large outlook, like mine, all fits into its place, and you're never flustered with joy, nor stricken with sorrow; you're never puffed up nor cast down; but you go on your rounds, like the sun in heaven, ready for the best and worst, with your gifts always at the service of your weaker brethren.

GAY. A thousand pities there ain't more such men.

TURTLE. You mustn't say that, neither. People like me be the leaven that leavens the lump; but you can't have the cake of life all plums, Butcher Gay.

[*Exeunt* WILLES GAY *and* THOMAS TURTLE.

SCENE III: *An old, neolithic hut circle in a coombe at Dartmoor edge. Here lies a rough ring of stones piled irregularly and built together with living grass, fern and heath. Above the circle ascends a white-thorn tree, and behind it there lifts a hill to the horizon. Here stands a tor, piled raggedly, like a small mountain, against a bright, clear sky. The hour is fair and sunny.* PHILIP BLANCHARD *sits beside the hut circle and leans back against a stone behind him. A few moments elapse; he lifts himself, flings off his hat and puts hand in his pocket. He listens. Faint and far off comes a voice. He listens still and the voice grows louder.*

JOHNNY SLOCOMBE. [*Off.*] Mr. Blanchard, Mr. Blanchard! [PHILIP *stands up and walks a few paces.*

JOHNNY. [*Louder.*] Mr. Blanchard—a reprieve—there's a reprieve, Mr. Blanchard!

[PHILIP *falls back. Grows unsteady and sits again.*

JOHNNY. [*Off.*] Where be you, Mr. Blanchard?

PHILIP. Here, by the roundy-poundy.

[*After a pause* JOHNNY SLOCOMBE *runs in and flings himself down panting.*

JOHNNY. I've run all the way from the village, master—all the way without stopping. Your missis met me and give me a shilling—a whole shilling—to run and tell you there's a reprieve. And she's coming too, but of course an old woman like her can't travel so fast as me.

PHILIP. Yes; she's coming, I see her sun-bonnet down below there. Have I got a shilling, I wonder? [*Feels in his pocket.*] Nay, but I've got two. You ran for something, Johnny.

[*Gives the boy a florin.*

JOHNNY. My stars! I be very near afraid of such a lot of money.

PHILIP. You earned it. A reprieve. Strange it came so quick. No more to tell?

JOHNNY. That's all she said.

PHILIP. I'll go down along to meet her.

[*Exit* PHILIP *excited and hopeful.*

JOHNNY. [*Walks up and down still panting. Then*

he sits where PHILIP *sat.*] Three shilling! [*Examines the money.*] Thirty-six pennies, that is! Shan't tell father—nor yet mother.

[*Exit* JOHNNY *slowly, thinking.*

[*After a short pause* PHILIP *enters, terribly cast down, and* HESTER, *excited and panting, follows him.*

HESTER. Don't take it so.

PHILIP. 'Twas done but for the doing. You lied to me—lied to a dying man! Nay, I was a dead man out of mind, and you fetched me back to this bitter hour.

HESTER. Hear me, then. 'Twas no lie, but truth. Wasn't you reprieved? Didn't Elias send your reprieve from his grave?

PHILIP. 'Tis only another pang to death to know he's gone.

HESTER. 'Tis life, I tell you! You can't die now. God's willed it and you can't kick against God.

PHILIP. I'm my own master yet.

HESTER. You're not; you're not no more. And I've got to show you you're not. I've got to larn you that you must live. Never was such a trumpet call to a man to live as you've heard to-day. He did a glorious deed and you be powerless afore it—unless you'd fling the gift of a man's life back in his face.

PHILIP. I didn't ax for the gift and I won't take it.

Be I the sort to take gifts? I give gifts—I don't take 'em. Shall my life go on in the smell of that man's blood? No man shall give his life for mine, I tell you. To have a thing forced upon you—to——

HESTER. Don't measure it; don't weigh it! Begin to weigh and the greatest deeds that we can do are light.

PHILIP. Against a man's pride yes—everything weighs light against a man's pride. I'm proud—proud as hell. Shall I go on living among the people and let him rot, without even a stone to tell the world what he was?

HESTER. Can pride rise above the life of a friend? 'Tisn't for you to say what you will do, or won't do. 'Tis for you to bend and go on your knees. The world goes on its knees afore Christ—don't it? And this man be your very own Christ—and gave his life for yours.

PHILIP. Not for mine—not for mine! I won't take it—I'll deny him and defy him. I be going to die, too, and join him afore the day's cold and say, "There's my life back for yours!" I won't take his life. I won't smother and choke under such a fearful gift. Death's a holiday to that.

HESTER. [*After reflecting a moment and watching him as he strides up and down.*] So be it then. You owe him nought. Smart no more, for you're outside this altogether. Elias didn't mean that. He knew you too well to mean that. 'Twas only my foolish-

ness to think it. This is nothing to do with you. Be at peace—give over raging. Not for you he did it; but for me! He loved me, and I'm a woman and can take it from him, because of his dear love. I can take it—on my knees, and thank God for evermore for making such a man. And my child shall do the same, as soon as his little tongue can tell it. He loved me—so cruel well that, sooner than my light should go out, he did this. A saint of God—and saints give more than us common folk can pay again. We can only pray our blessings on them.

PHILIP. 'Tis worse than gall to be in the debt of the dead!

HESTER. Is it so hard to take from him that loved so well? He gave his goodness like the trees their fruit—gave and gave again, with never a thought for thanks.

PHILIP. Justice, I tell you. Shall I stand by and let him go down to the dust with all men's scorn and hate for his gravestone? His good name be in our care now, and I'm crying out to shout it to the people.

HESTER. The people! What are the people? God Almighty's gotten his prize for him. 'Tis there, not here. If you tell the people this thing, then he died in vain. You call for justice—then be just to him. All cowardice would it be to die now and flout the wish of the dead.

PHILIP. His memory shall be pure.

HESTER. It is for ever; for it lies in God's keeping; and when the books be opened all men will know what he was. But here—for the minute—for our little minute together—you and me—we must—for justice—for justice to him and the mighty thing he did and the reason he did it——

PHILIP. You're selfish to speak so. 'Tis no temptation what you offer me.

HESTER. I ban't trying to tempt you, Phil. If you can say that, 'tis you be selfish. You're not thinking of him no more—you're thinking of yourself now—yourself and your own peace. My Philip ain't brave no more—he's a coward now. If my love hungers dreadful to save you alive—be that strange? But I'm not putting my love afore you—I'm only putting his love afore both of us. [*Caressing him.*] Believe that, for God's sake, whether you live or die.

[PHILIP *puts her away.*

HESTER. For him—for him, so that his greatness and loving-kindness be not all flung in the dust. Don't he speak to us in this as never man spoke to men? And shan't we listen? I'd have raised Heaven to prevent it—but him and his God was stronger than you and me. Don't you tell me I'm a selfish woman. Try to think what 'tis to give up all —all—and then to have all given back to you. Phil —Phil—didn't I say 'good-bye' to 'e? Didn't I lose 'e? Wasn't you dead? Be I to lose you twice? 'Tis more than you can ax a poor woman to do that. Don't rob me of my precious gift—don't flout the

giver. With his own hand he gave you back to me. [*She weeps.*

PHILIP. D'you want me to live in hell?

HESTER. Better that than spoil his heaven. Live in hell then—and I'll live there along with you. You be called to suffer—then suffer—let it be your bravery to suffer—let that be your pride—to suffer as no man has suffered yet! Bend under the yoke for his sake. You'd rather die than live; but you can't die now—you can't turn his joy into grief. The pain of death was over for you. You'd done the hard part—you'd left me. May be you've suffered enough already. And Elias—the prayer of such a man will count—eh, Phil? He'll call on God for us—so that there shall be a little bleak sunshine for our child when he comes.

PHILIP. You can think o' that? And me twice a murderer now. 'Tis almost more than a man built like me can do to——

HESTER. God'll larn you how. He'll make the hard possible—for the sake of Elias.

PHILIP. Nothing can ever be the same again. You can never be the same again. I can never wake up no more and watch you asleep beside me like I did My child won't be nothing but a pang to me now Everything be turned black as night and hell, look where I will.

HESTER. Shadows pass—shadows pass, I tell you—they can't hang still for all time. Never a thunder cloud but its darkness goes by.

PHILIP. Not till the bolt has fallen.

HESTER. It has done—and missed you.

PHILIP. Because another have took the lightning to his heart for pity. Curse pity—curse his pity. It have turned my life into death.

HESTER. Don't say it. None be so strong he can stand alone. Don't all men suffer from their fellows, or gain from them? Be true to him that was so true to me. Be loyal to him that was so loyal to me. Think of me a little too. Don't put no more on a poor, daft woman. And yet I'll bear and bear until I break for you, Phil. I'll suffer more yet. Fire and water I'll fight for you—time's self I'll fight and make it fly.

PHILIP. Time was over. I'd bid good-bye to time. I'd sat aloft here and thought of the old men who lived in these here stones, and roamed my eyes round the world and the village and took leave of everything.

HESTER. Not everything. You didn't know everything. There's no righting wrong in the grave; there's no making good there. You can't creep in the pit now with all your work to do. For him to go was different—one life for three he gave. For you to go—you've got to live with me—with me beside you always. That's what he willed—that's what he died for. And my poor hands be here—always here for you to take hold on—and my poor heart's beating only for you. Don't break it. [*Her voice grows faint and she shows weakness. She holds out her hands to him, but*

he does not move.] For your Hester—for love of your Hester. [*She kneels to him, then she throws herself at his feet and puts her head upon them and her arms round his legs.*] Live—live—live!

[PHILIP *looks down at her. Then he takes a pistol from his pocket. He unloads it and flings it on the ground. He bends down and strokes her hair.*

PHILIP. I be going to go on living, Hester.

[THE END]

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THE MOTHER

BY THE SAME
AUTHOR

THE SECRET WOMAN
THE SHADOW
DOWN DARTMOOR WAY
CURTAIN RAISERS
A BREEZY MORNING
ETC. ETC.

CHARACTERS

IVES POMEROY, *son of Avisa Pomeroy.* Aged 25.
MATTHEW NORTHMORE, *of Stone Park Farm.* Aged 45.
ARTHUR BROWN, *a schoolmaster.* Aged 30.
NATHAN CAWKER, *known to the world as "Moleskin."* Aged 60.
GEORGE BONUS } *labourers at Stone Park*
SAMUEL WICKETT }
EMMANUEL CODD, *potman at the "Green Man."* Aged 70.
NICHOLAS TOOP, *a policeman.* Aged 28.
INSPECTOR FORREST.
TWO CONSTABLES.
BUTCHER'S BOY.
AVISA POMEROY, *mistress of the "Green Man" public-house.* Aged 45.
LIZZIE POMEROY, *her daughter.* Aged 22.
RUTH RENDLE, *barmaid at the "Green Man."* Aged 24.
JILL WICKETT, *wife of Samuel Wickett.* Aged 25.

CAST OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF

THE MOTHER

AT THE REPERTORY THEATRE, LIVERPOOL, OCTOBER 22, 1913

PRODUCED BY LAWRENCE HANRAY

IVES POMEROY	F. PENNINGTON-GUSH
MATTHEW NORTHMORE	LAWRENCE HANRAY
ARTHUR BROWN	ALGERNON GREIG
NATHAN CAWKER	WILFRED E. SHINE
GEORGE BONUS	GEORGE DEWHURST
SAMUEL WICKETT	J. A. DODD
EMMANUEL CODD	HOWARD COCHRAN
NICHOLAS TOOP	CECIL ROSE
INSPECTOR FORREST	LAWRENCE ANDERSON
A BUTCHER'S BOY	LEONARD CLARKE
AVISA POMEROY	GERTRUDE STERROLL
LIZZIE POMEROY	EILEEN THORNDIKE
RUTH RENDLE	DOROTHY THOMAS
JILL WICKETT	KATHLEEN FITZSIMONS

ACT I

SCENE: *The dwelling-room of the* POMEROYS *at "The Green Man" Inn. A low-ceiled room of good size. At the back a door, with glass panes in it, which are covered with a red curtain, opens into the bar, and a roll-top desk stands beside it; to the left is the fire-place, with a large easy chair on each side of it. To the right a wooden stair ascends from the room, and beneath it is a door, which leads to a cellar. This door is papered over like the walls of the room. The furniture is upholstered in horsehair and has white antimacassars thrown over it. Upon the walls are a few coloured prints from illustrated Christmas numbers, a large coloured portrait of Queen Victoria and so forth. Upon the mantel-shelf are chimney ornaments. The second entrance to this room is to the left below the window. A table is spread for tea.*

[ARTHUR BROWN, LIZZIE POMEROY *and* RUTH RENDLE *discovered at the tea-table about their meal.*

BROWN. More watercress, Miss Rendle, please. People don't eat enough watercress. No, Lizzie, your

mother does not understand Ives. When you became my fiancée, I turned my attention to the subject and soon found it a very painful one.

[*Shakes his head and eats watercress.*

LIZZIE. You're such a student of character, Arthur. Of course, all schoolmasters are. Dear Ives can't get over losing Jill Wickett.

RUTH. He's a rare stickler for justice.

BROWN. The truth is that when the girl threw him over Ives lost all self-control, and went to the bad.

RUTH. It was a mean thing! Jill had promised to marry Lizzie's brother and then——

BROWN. Took Samuel Wickett, at Mr. Northmore's farm. For his prospects, if I hear rightly. No more, Lizzie, thank you. You make the tea far too strong. It was a very improper match, because Samuel Wickett has a leg in the grave already, if you'll excuse the expression; but he is his old uncle's heir and Jill will get two thousand pounds by this marriage some day.

RUTH. Ives is well out of it, if she's that sort.

LIZZIE. So mother says. She was thankful when Jill gave him up.

RUTH. But you couldn't expect Ives to be.

LIZZIE. Ives is so dark and secret nowadays, and always with that hateful Mr. Cawker—him what they call "Moleskin."

BROWN. Grammar, Lizzie! Yes, Cawker is a most irregular old man and no friend for youth.

[RUTH *rises and finishes her cup of tea standing.*

BROWN. How does Mrs. Pomeroy find herself?

LIZZIE. Pretty well, Arthur; up and down, but she never tells us about her bad days till they're passed.

BROWN. I have advised her to consult——

[*Enter* IVES. *He accosts the women violently.*

IVES. Why the devil ain't one of you lazy girls in the bar? Keeping mother there when she ought to be at her tea.

RUTH. She's had her tea. I've only been five minutes.

IVES. [*Meaningly.*] Northmore's riding down the hill. [*Exit* RUTH *into the bar.* How the deuce she can stand that fiddle-faced fool beats me.

BROWN. Mr. Northmore is no fool, Ives.

IVES. It's his farm, of course. Everything in a petticoat is always thinking of Number One.

BROWN. Pull yourself together! You're too old to behave like a child.

IVES. Don't you lecture me, or I'll break your neck! You bully the school-children and that silly girl.

BROWN. You won't make me angry.

[*Brushes the crumbs off his waistcoat.*

LIZZIE. How dare you talk like that, Ives? You ought to be ashamed; and Arthur so patient with you!

IVES. Go to hell, and take him too! He's making you as hateful as himself.

[*Enter* EMMANUEL CODD *with a bucket of peat.*

BROWN. This is most ungentlemanly, Ives.

CODD. [*Very excited.*] Hast heard the great news? Two men blown to ribbons at the granite quarry.

IVES. And nobody better pleased than you, you adder.

CODD. Drunk again!

IVES. [*To* CODD.] Clear out, afore I kick you out! [CODD *scowls at* IVES.] And don't look at me like that, you ugly old ape!

CODD. I don't want to look at you.

IVES. Begone, then.

CODD. Aye, I'll go—and go for good. More I'll not endure. I give notice. I——

IVES. No such luck. You'll hang on here [*Exit* CODD *with bucket*] till you're rotten.

BROWN. This is very discreditable, Ives.

Enter AVISA *from the bar.*

LIZZIE. Mother, Emmanuel's given notice again.

AVISA. Has he? Poor, old, cranky chap.

BROWN. My visit to Exeter is fixed for Tuesday, Mrs. Pomeroy.

IVES. Then mind you buy Lizzie's tokening ring. 'Tis about time she had it.

AVISA. Hush, my dear; Arthur's talking.

IVES. Talking—what's the use of talking? His own stupid bleat's the only thing he cares to hear.

[*Flings himself down in the chair by fire.*

AVISA. Come, come, sonny!

IVES. I wish you wouldn't be so deadly calm, mother.

LIZZIE. How can you, Ives? Just because you're crossed.

IVES. "Crossed"! "Crossed"! When a man's life is scat to shivers! "Crossed"! Get out of my sight, you little fool, or I'll fling a knife at you.

[AVISA *sits down besides* IVES *and takes his hand. He flings her hand aside. She takes his hand again. He leaves it a moment.*

IVES. My blood's boiling!

AVISA. But don't let it boil over. Give him a cup of tea, Lizzie.

IVES. Tea! Hell fire—that's what I want to drink. Cuss the whole pack of you—hard-hearted, frozen creatures! [*Starts up and goes out.*

AVISA. [*Goes to her chair by the fire.*] No sight of land for my Ives yet, bless his heart.

BROWN. The first thing is to break the natural instincts, which are always evil. We begin at the wrong end, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. The fault of the age, my dear. They began at the other end—with a birch—in my young days.

BROWN. No, no! Corporal punishment is quite exploded.

AVISA. So his father thought—worse luck for Ives. The world's growing a soft place sure enough. I hope it won't grow silly soft.

LIZZIE. Ives has been drinking.

AVISA. Dear, stupid fellow. When I was a maid, such things happed to me, Lizzie, that I'd have got drunk too, sometimes—if I'd dared. [*Laughing gently.*

LIZZIE. Mother!

AVISA. If he'd known me when I was a girl, Arthur here would have thought I wasn't a good companion for you.

BROWN. You surprise me, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. [*Her face twinkling.*] A very headstrong, selfish maiden was I; and 'tis lucky I don't forget it.

LIZZIE. It's that hateful Jill. If Ives could only put her out of his mind and think of some other girl.

BROWN. It might save him. We know that the love of a really good woman——

LIZZIE. Ruth Rendle likes him, you can see she does.

AVISA. Ruth is all I'd wish her; but if you want truth, my pretty, she's a long way too good for our Ives. He's not wife-old for all his years.

LIZZIE. He says that Ruth's a frosty old maid.

AVISA. Not her! We're only old maids when the wrong man comes along. Frost in the morning—fire at night. Ives loves the showy girls—like a bird chooses a cherry.

[*A knock at the door.* LIZZIE *answers it and admits* MR. CAWKER. *He carries a gun and an old game-bag slung over his shoulder.*

CAWKER. Be that master-piece, your mother, home, Miss Lizzie? [*Comes in.*

BROWN. Well, I must take my leave. I return

from Exeter on Wednesday, by the 7.32, which reaches Tavistock at 8.51.

[*Shakes hands with* MRS. POMEROY. LIZZIE *goes out with him.*

AVISA. I want to see you, Moleskin. I'm a lot put about by a thing I heard in the bar five minutes agone.

CAWKER. How's your heart?

AVISA. It have to beat a brave while yet, please God.

CAWKER. I've brought 'e a pair o' golden plover for your own eating. [*Takes birds from his bag.*] And I must see Ives. He was in my company a bit not long ago—reckless like and up for justice and down on all tyrants.

AVISA. What has he done?

CAWKER. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] God forgive me; we all know I'm like the moon and only shine by night; but Ives—

Enter LIZZIE.

AVISA. Run after your brother, Lizzie. Moleskin wants to see him.

[LIZZIE *takes her sunbonnet from a nail behind the door and goes out.*

CAWKER. Just the manhood in him crying out for justice; and if you can get your justice and your pleasure together—why, so much the better. You know me. I'm the same as the hawks and weasels. Life for me is death for something else. A gun's my only tool. My nature droops if I see a spade or a

pick-axe. There's nought so badly paid as honest work, and I don't like it; it don't suit me, and I won't touch it.

AVISA. Always a choice with you between doing wrong and doing nothing.

CAWKER. Any fool can work; it takes a man to play. I'll work my fingers to the bone—to escape work. Life's not a lesson—'tis a game, Avisa Pomeroy.

AVISA. A game of skill then, not a game of chance.

CAWKER. Ah, my dear, that all depends on what cards God Almighty deals out to 'e. If I'd got Squire Masterman's lot, I'd be a fine old English gentleman and a master of hounds, and the pride of ten parishes and the saviour of the poor. Any man could play that hand. But I've only got Nathan Cawker's cards, and so I'm a baggering old poacher and the shame of the country side. But I play my lot for all they're worth.

AVISA. For more than they're worth I reckon—and that's cheating. What's my boy been up to?

CAWKER. Trying to open the eyes of a rich man.

AVISA. Ives must learn a bit himself afore he can teach.

CAWKER. But I wouldn't have sorrow his schoolmaster.

AVISA. Not if happiness will do it. None that loves justice like him will go far wrong in the end.

CAWKER. [*Shaking his head.*] Justice be a funny shaped article—especially the justice of a justice of the peace. And 'tis so terrible difficult to get other

people to see your point of view. There was my father —lost his leg in a man-trap he did. And never saw the justice of it to his dying day. But your boy—terrible high-minded I'm sure—and a church-goer too.

AVILA. Aye. He goes to please me—and look at the girls. [*She laughs.*

Enter IVES.

CAWKER. Ah, here's the brave boy!

IVES. [*To* AVISA.] Let Codd pluck them birds. Don't you do it. 'Twill weary you.

AVISA. Moleskin wants you, and be full of mysteries. [*Exit* AVISA.

CAWKER. Here's the devil to pay. They pheasants of that hard-hearted creature, Square Masterman.

IVES. I don't care how hard he's hit.

CAWKER. I know. More do I. But he's going to hit back. 'Tis found out that you was there, and he knows it, and he's told the police to go ahead.

IVES. What about you?

CAWKER. Well—they suspect me—they always do suspect me at these times; but somehow they can't prove nothing—as usual. I was ill just then and kept my bed, and my daughter can swear an alibi. But you'll have to cut and run, I reckon, till the trouble's over.

IVES. Was it the poulterer at Tavistock gave me away?

CAWKER. He's in the cart too. The warrant's out. They'll come any minute.

IVES. I'll stand to it.

CAWKER. Don't you be a fool. 'Tis no good talking

free trade to the justices—nor yet socialism neither. I know 'em. You run away, my son—then you'll live to fight another day,

[*The door into the bar opens and* MATTHEW NORTHMORE *enters.*

NORTHMORE. Excuse me, Ives Pomeroy; but Miss Rendle knew that Cawker was in here, and I want to speak to him.

[IVES *and* CAWKER *regard* NORTHMORE *without friendliness.*

NORTHMORE. [*To* CAWKER.] It's this. I won't have you at Stone Park. I've warned you thrice. Don't trespass on my ground, or on my side of the river again, or I'll take the law into my own hands.

CAWKER. Now hearken to that! A right down Tory is Matthew Northmore; and for why? For the silliest, tom-fool reason in the world. Because his father was one afore him!

IVES. Narrow as the grave, you be, and cold as charity.

NORTHMORE. [*To* IVES.] You're young—too young to take good advice. But there's one thing will pay you, and that's to mind your own business. Experience is a hard master, and so you'll find it.

CAWKER. And what d'you think I was going to do, farmer? I was coming up to Stone Park this very night to offer to trap your rabbits—all free, gratis and for friendship. Trotting home in the dawn a bit ago, I see the varmints in your grass by the thousand. "Poor man," I thought, "I must help him. There

he is in his bed, sleeping like an innocent babe and——"

NORTHMORE. Liar! There's not a rabbit in my ground and you know it.

CAWKER. Then no doubt they was monkeys—or perhaps kangaroos.

IVES. You go back to Ruth and mend your manners.

NORTHMORE. Who are you to call her "Ruth"?

IVES. Don't you teach me how to treat the girls—a damned old bachelor like you.

CAWKER. Women be a noble branch of larning, farmer, but you've begun too late: you'll always be a dunce at 'em. Now I've loved 'em from the time I was fifteen.

Enter AVISA.

This wonder of women will bear me out. I kissed her afore she was five and offered to marry her when she was ten.

IVES. Come here, Moleskin. What's best to do?

[*Exeunt* MOLESKIN *and* IVES.

NORTHMORE. I'm sorry for your boy. He's going to the dogs, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. Very good company the dogs can be, Matthew.

NORTHMORE. They're honest and that's more than he is.

AVISA. Don't you say that, for I won't hear it. His father's son—faults enough, but honest and just.

NORTHMORE. I'm not the man's keeper and I can't be his friend, for he won't let me. He's lazy most times; but he's been working a bit too hard for once—among Masterman's game birds.

AVISA. Ives! You can believe that?

NORTHMORE. I heard it from Inspector Forrest himself.

AVISA. Poaching! 'Tis false. He'd never sink to it.

NORTHMORE. His left-handed justice. He's savage still over Wickett's wife and wanted somebody to smart. He needs a sharp lesson. Fourteen days hard he's earned—maybe more. I'm terrible sorry for you.

AVISA. It can't be—it can't be, Matthew. He couldn't do that. [AVISA *is much moved.*

NORTHMORE. I hope you're right. He'll have every chance to clear himself.

Enter RUTH *from the bar.*

RUTH. Here's Mr. Westlake about the cider barrels, Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. [*Pulling herself together.*] I'll speak to him.

RUTH. The bar's empty.

AVISA. Think twice afore you let yourself believe this, Matthew. [*Exit* AVISA *into bar.*

NORTHMORE. I've hurt her—and cruel sorry to do it.

RUTH. About her son? He means so well.

NORTHMORE. He's a rogue—and she'll live to know it. Leave him. You'll read the story-book I brought you, Miss Rendle? 'Tis a good tale.

RUTH. Thank you very much, Mr. Northmore, Yes, I'll be sure to read it.

NORTHMORE. And you'll come for a walk o' Sunday?

RUTH. 'Tis most kind I'm sure.

NORTHMORE. I do greatly look forward to it. A promise, remember. Good-bye, and thank you for reading the book.

[*He shakes hands and looks at her with love. He holds her hand and she drops her eyes, from his ardent face. He goes out and she shuts the door, which he leaves open. Then she goes off to the bar. After a few moments* IVES *returns alone. He is excited. He takes a bunch of keys off a nail, goes to the big roll-top desk and opens it. He takes out a cash-box and is putting some money into his pocket when his mother returns from the bar.*

AVISA. Who's wanting that, sonny?

IVES. I am, mother. There's a bit of trouble coming, and I'd meant to stand up to it and say what I'd done it for, but 'twill be better not. They're after me for some of that blasted Masterman's pheasants.

[*He puts money in his pocket.*

AVISA. Well, you can face a lie.

IVES. 'Tisn't a lie. I shot 'em—for justice. Masterman's a slave-driver. He grinds the face of the poor He turned off my friend, Amos Coaker, for no fault. [*Laughing.*] Moleskin took the money—the sly dog. But he's safe. They can't touch him.

AVISA. [*Angry.*] How have you the heart—? You laugh—you ought to groan, Ives Pomeroy! I'd never have thought it—or dreamed it!

IVES. More fool you. I'm up against all tyrants, and so be all my side; and I'll strike where I please, and how I please, and as hard as I please.

AVISA. Do two wrongs make a right? 'Tis wild trash you be talking.

IVES. The rich shan't rob the poor for ever!

AVISA. [*Sternly.*] Be silent and hear me. That a son of mine should be rash and venturesome is natural; but no son of mine has the right to be a fool. To shoot a man's game——

IVES. You've laughed at my pranks before.

AVISA. You've never stolen your neighbours' goods afore. You've never dirtied your father's name afore.

IVES. All right, then; I won't trouble you with my affairs, mother. I hate money, and I hate the rich, and I hate you for siding with them. 'Tis mean cowardice to support the selfish wretches. I'll run at your apron-strings no more, if you're that sort.

AVISA. [*Sorrowfully and slowly.*] Then let life teach you your first hard lesson, Ives Pomeroy. And I'll bear it and bend to it for my love.

IVES. Let life teach me the strong want to help the weak. And I'll bend to it too. But they don't and never did. Wait till the weak all think alike, and then they'll be weak no more.

Enter LIZZIE.

LIZZIE. Here's Mr. Forrest and three policemen coming through the meadow gate!

IVES. Ha-ha! They'll bolt their coney—they won't catch him. [*Goes to door under the stairs.*] I'll slip in the cellar, and you nip round and unlock the grating afore they come, Lizzie. Hold 'em five minutes, mother, and I'm safe. [*Opens door and descends cellar steps. Then jumps up again.*] Come to the Hunter's Cross with a bit of food after midnight, Lizzie. I'll wait there till I see you, and then away. Tell Forrest I'm not at home, mother.

[*Goes down cellar steps, shuts the door behind him and prepares to haste away.*

AVISA. Bide where you be, Lizzie!

LIZZIE. But mother——

AVISA. Bide where you be. The darkest day that has ever dawned for us, my pretty.

LIZZIE. Oh mother, save him!

AVISA. Please God, I will!

Enter INSPECTOR FORREST, NICHOLAS TOOP, *and two other* CONSTABLES.

AVISA. [*Gripping her hands together and speaking to herself, but aloud.*] Lord have mercy on my son! Lord have mercy on my son! [*She controls herself and turns to* FORREST.] Good evening, Mr. Inspector.

FORREST. Good evening, ma'am. I'm proper sorry for this. 'Tis your boy. Here's the warrant. Us all hope he'll clear himself. But it looks terrible

like as if he had a hand in that pheasant shooting at Squire Masterman's.

AVISA. He had. He's told me. I'd have believed nobody but himself. He's here.

[*Goes to cellar stairs and opens the door.*

TOOP. A cruel thing for you, ma'am.

AVISA. Love's a hard taskmaster, Nicholas Toop.

FORREST. [*At top of stairs.*] Ives Pomeroy, I've got to arrest you for shooting of pheasants on the night of the third of November at Tudor Manor. For the present you'd best to say nought. Come quiet, like a man. My trap's outside. [*Takes handcuffs from one of the policemen. There is a pause.*] Stand by the door, Nicholas. You men go down.

[TOOP *stands by the door. The other two* POLICEMEN *descend into the cellar. No one speaks. There are muffled voices below. Then* IVES *ascends and enters. Behind him come the* POLICEMEN.

FORREST. You're wise not to——

IVES. [*In a rage to his mother.*] God damn you evermore for this, you traitor to your own son! And never again, so long as I live, shall my head come under your roof. And never will I call you "mother" more! [*Holding out his hands.*] Put 'em on! I'd sooner rot in clink till Doom than bide along with her. [*They handcuff him.*

FORREST. Come on, my lad. The dusk is down and none will see you.

IVES. [*To his mother.*] And if I go to hell, 'tis you have driven me there, you heartless devil!

[*He goes off between the two* POLICEMEN. FORREST *and* NICHOLAS *follow.* AVISA *exhibits physical pain and puts her hand to her bosom.*

LIZZIE. [*Weeping.*] Mother, mother! He'll darken our doors no more.

AVISA. [*Putting her arms round* LIZZIE.] Darken our doors he can't, my pretty. Better than sunshine always.

LIZZIE. [*Sobbing.*] He'll be the death of you!

AVISA. [*Takes her handkerchief and wipes* LIZZIE'S *eyes.*] Nay, nay; I'll be the life of him!

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *The bar of "The Green Man" public-house. The counter of the bar runs parallel with front of stage. To the left is a window and a door, to the right an open fireplace with a high settle at right angles to it, facing the proscenium. The floor is sanded. The usual paraphernalia of beer engine, bottles, water bottles, glasses, mugs, matches and ash-trays distinguishes the counter. There is a flap on the left side, which is thrown up and admits of access from the bar to the counter and to a door which opens from behind the counter. This is the door which communicates with the private parlour of the Pomeroys. It is of glass, covered with a red curtain. On the high dresser which runs behind the bar are rows of bright bottles, red and green wine-glasses, etc. Three barrels stand on trestles beneath them, and above these is a smaller barrel containing spirits. Various advertisements of brewers and wine merchants, and the bill of a sale of stock are hung about the bar. A few old sporting prints decorate the wall above the chimney shelf. The masks of a fox or two also hang upon*

the walls. An oil lamp hangs over the bar, and there is another smaller lamp on the mantelshelf. The time is evening.

[RUTH RENDLE *and* MATTHEW NORTHMORE *discovered. She stands behind the bar. He bends over towards her.*

RUTH. Have you heard any more of Ives Pomeroy?

NORTHMORE. No. 'Twas a light sentence. The Justices knew a bit about his family, and Masterman didn't press it against him. Since he came out he's been stopping with that old blackguard Cawker, the man he's got to thank for his trouble.

RUTH. But Moleskin would do anything for Mrs. Pomeroy. He's awful sorry. He's at Ives day and night to come home again. His mother's hopeful that it 'll soon happen. Each night she makes all ready for him.

NORTHMORE. There's more going on than she knows. And whose got the heart to tell her? There was great talk whether she did right or wrong to give him up. For my part she did very right. A lesson he wanted, as I told her, and a lesson he got; though it seems he won't learn it.

RUTH. No son of that woman could be very bad, Matthew.

NORTHMORE. He's bad all through, and the sooner you know it, Ruth, the better for your piece of mind. He's after my dairymaid again.

RUTH. Jill! But she's married.

NORTHMORE. That don t stop him. When she took Sam Wickett I was sorry for it. For one thing, poor Sammy's a dying man; for another, she's a worthless baggage, and only wanted his uncle's money. A proper liar, too. She's a good dairymaid, and that's all you can say for her; but she must be a bit of a fool, for if she goes wrong she'll lose what she married for.

RUTH. She's a lovely woman.

NORTHMORE. Be there more than one lovely woman in the world?

[*He looks at her and tries to catch her hand.*

RUTH. [*Sighing.*] If only you knew how your eyes make my heart ache, Matthew. I'm a stupid girl and full of trouble. I shall never make any man happy.

NORTHMORE. Then let a man make you happy. By God! I'd roam the wide world and fight the wide world to find happiness for you, Ruth.

RUTH. We must win our own happiness.

NORTHMORE. Love came late to me, but now 'tis a raging fire. Love's bitter quick to see and feel, without eyes or fingers. I know more about you than you know yourself. Everything I know—everything. There's but one living creature between you and me, and his name is Ives Pomeroy. There! 'Tis out—more shame on me; but you've made me dead to shame. I'd face the scorn of the whole world now for your sake.

RUTH. He's nothing to me, and you know it.

NORTHMORE. No, he's nothing to you, because he's

a blind and wilful fool. But he might be something —he might be everything.

RUTH. How dare you say that?

NORTHMORE. Because I'm mad, now and then, along with you; and the mad tell truth. I like to hurt you; I like to see the blood come and go in your cheeks. But what's your pain to mine? To think he might have you, and he's running after that trash, Sam Wickett's wife!

RUTH. You're a coward to say these things.

Enter ARTHUR BROWN *and* LIZZIE POMEROY.

BROWN. Ah, neighbour Northmore, a fine evening.

LIZZIE. [*To* RUTH.] The moon's that lovely down in the woods, Ruth, I wish you could see it. Arthur has been telling me how far off it is and exactly what it weighs.

BROWN. A bottle of lemonade, Miss Rendle, please. And pour it into two glasses. [*Takes out his purse, and speaks to* NORTHMORE.] I haven't signed anything you know—too liberal-minded for that I hope. But if you consider the teetotal movement in all its bearings, you must approve. So I am consistent and practise what I preach.

NORTHMORE. 'Tis hard to be consistent.

BROWN. Not to me; I never feel in the least tempted to change my opinions, when once they are formed.

[RUTH *has opened a bottle of lemonade and poured it into two glasses.* BROWN *gives*

RUTH *threepence.* LIZZIE *drinks her lemonade.* BROWN *sips his.*

NORTHMORE. I must be gone.

LIZZIE. We've seen Ives. He's hovering round like a homing pigeon, so mother says.

NORTHMORE. Hovering like a hawk, more like. Good night. Forgive me. [*To* RUTH.] 'Twas only truth I told. [*Shakes her hand.*] Good night.

[*Nods to* LIZZIE *and* BROWN.

[*Exit* MATTHEW NORTHMORE.

LIZZIE. Oh, Ruth, at Lane End we saw him. I spoke, but he didn't answer; and Arthur told him that he wished to hold out the hand of friendship and let the dead past bury the past; but Ives just slipped by us and took no notice.

BROWN. He really ought to bend to the rod. It's very unsatisfactory. He doesn't consider how such rash behaviour affects the community. Many men in my position, Miss Ruth, would think twice before contracting an alliance with such a man!

LIZZIE. Arthur!

RUTH. I'm afraid he'd break every bone in your body, Mr Brown, if you threw Lizzie over.

BROWN. I throw her over! Am I the sort of man who could throw the woman of my choice over, Miss Ruth? Oh, no—quite the contrary I assure you. I'm merely saying what some men might do.

Enter JILL WICKETT.

JILL. Good evening. Be my husband here?

RUTH. No, Jill.

JILL. 'Tis time he was home. He's been to Tavistock along with George Bonus to sell sheep, and he's sure to come in here on his way back to Stone Park.

LIZZIE. I hope he's better, Jill?

JILL. He'll never be no better, poor chap.

BROWN. It should be your privilege to brighten his declining days, Mrs. Wickett.

JILL. I've done what I could, schoolmaster. He wants a nurse not a wife.

BROWN. There is no nurse like a good wife, my poor woman.

Enter AVISA *from behind the bar.*

AVISA. Get to bed, you girls. 'Tis time you was off. I'll take the bar till Codd comes home.

LIZZIE. Oh, mother, we saw Ives at Lane End.

BROWN. I saluted him with friendship; but he—— [*Shakes his head and looks at his watch.*] Good gracious! Ten o'clock. What am I thinking about!

AVISA. Good night, Arthur. Be off, Lizzie; and you too, Ruth.

BROWN. [*To* LIZZIE.] Good night, dear one. [*Raises his hat.*] Good night, ladies. [*Exit* BROWN.

RUTH. Let me stop till Codd comes back.

AVISA. No, I'm very well to-night—very happy too. [*To* RUTH.] He's near—I know it—I feel it somehow.

LIZZIE. [*Goes behind the bar and kisses her mother.*] Good night, mother. He won't hold off much longer. He can't.

[*Goes off behind bar.* JILL *moves to window of room and lifts blinds and looks out.*

RUTH. Let me stop?

JILL. Best to go, Miss. I want a word with Mrs. Pomeroy.

AVISA. You go, Ruth.

RUTH. Good-night, then. Don't be standing—'tis bad for you. Sit in your chair. [*Exit* RUTH.

AVISA. What's the matter with you, Jill?

JILL. Be you bearing malice against me still?

AVISA. Not I. And never did. No need to go back to that. You flung over my boy and I was glad of it.

JILL. I did wrong, and I was punished, and my lot's a cruel hard one, I can tell you. But I'm here for your son's sake—not for my own.

AVISA. What has he got to do with you now?

JILL. I'm only his messenger. I've seen him a bit of late. I've comforted him, and he's comforted me for that matter. He was in sore need of a friend, and so was I.

AVISA. Good powers, Jill Wickett, what are you talking about?

JILL. [*Shrugging her shoulders.*] He'll tell you. He's a rare wonder, and God knows why ever I gave him up. Nobody understands the man like you and me. A proper hero he is.

AVISA. This won't do; and if you're playing about with him again——

JILL. 'Tis no use talking to me like that, Mrs. Pomeroy; I'm only a girl, and a cruel unhappy girl, too. I've paid with a bucket of bitter tears for my mistake. He knows. Your son knows. But 'tis hard when you're so young as me to— But life's opened my eyes and showed me myself, and showed what your son be, too, for that matter. I'm a woman as feels, and I do to others as they do unto me, Mrs. Pomeroy. I'm built so. If I'm happy I want for the rest of the world to be happy; but if I'm miserable I try my very best to make everybody else the same. And I be miserable now, and what girl wouldn't be—linked to a death's head? You can't ask a fine creature like me to ruin my life——

AVISA. Have done, Jill! What wicked stuff is this you're talking?

JILL. He'll tell you. 'Tisn't wicked—'tis nature. 'Twas a message from Ives that I brought. He's not fifty yards away at this moment; and to-night, when the pub's shut up, he's coming home—coming to see you for a bit.

AVISA. To-night?

JILL. After closing. And I'll say this before he comes. He's a brave, good fellow, and I'm proud to call him my friend, and I'd lay down my life for him, and I don't care who knows it.

Enter CODD.

AVISA. [*Aside to* JILL.] I'll open the bar door to him when they've gone.

JILL. He's very wishful to have you his side, ma'am, and so be I. He loves you something tremendous. He's forgiven everything and hopes you'll do the same.

AVISA. [*Putting her hand to her breast.*] I felt it—I felt he was coming home to-night.

JILL. [*To* AVISA.] He's terrible wishful to pleasure you; and so be I—God knows. Good-night, ma'am. I'll tell him you'll be here. [*To* CODD.] If my Sammy comes in, you bid him hurry home, Mr. Codd. 'Tis time the poor chap was to bed. [*Exit* JILL.

CODD. What be she doing here? Like her cheek to come and see you—the cat.

AVISA. A message from my son.

CODD. Ah! She carries his messages, do she? Mark me, she'll be carrying something else of his afore long!

AVISA. [*Concerned with her own thoughts.*] My son be coming back again.

CODD. Of course—who doubts it? 'Tis all talk and cussing and noise with him. Here's the only place in the world where he can have his victuals free, and waste his time, and do no work, and run about and play and let his mother pay for his fun.

AVISA. Why be you such a bitter-weed, Emmanuel? [*Going.*

CODD. Because I ban't built to forget, nor yet to forgive. 'Tis only born fools do either.

[*Exit* AVISA *through door at back of bar.* CODD *pours himself out a drink.*

Enter GEORGE BONUS *and* SAMUEL WICKETT.

CODD. And he'll brew hell-broth for everybody again afore long—Ives Pomeroy—poisonous toad that he is.

BONUS. Give us a drop of gin, Codd. Here's poor Sammy Wickett coughing his soul up.

WICKETT. As to Ives Pomeroy, my wife says that he's going to be quite a reformed character; don't she, George?

BONUS. We'll hope so.

CODD. Your Jill says it? [*Helping them to drink.*

WICKETT. Yes, my dear wife have had a bit of talk along with him. He's forgiven her in a very Christian spirit, so she tells me. She couldn't help loving me better'n him; could she, George?

BONUS. Of course not. Love don't ax leave to come.

CODD. Nor yet to go again. Did you sell the sheep?

WICKETT. We sold 'em. 'Twas a great adventure. They fetched three pound more than Mister Northmore counted on—didn't they, George?

BONUS. So they did, Sammy.

WICKETT. [*Laughing feebly.*] And I've got the money in my pocket; ain't I, George?

BONUS. I hope so. Drink up and we'll have one more for luck.

WICKETT. 'Tis wonnerful the prices master gets for his things.

CODD. Lucky in life—unlucky in love, that man.

BONUS. He's terrible gone after your Miss Rendle, without a doubt.

WICKETT. 'Twould be a very good thing if she was to take him; wouldn't it, George?

CODD. He've escaped 'em till now. What does he want to mess himself up with a female for?

WICKETT. 'Twould be a godsend for Stone Park if he was to get such a fine, clever woman.

[CODD *begins to wash dirty mugs and tumblers.*

CODD. Your wife was in here a minute ago. She wants you home. 'Tis time you was to bed.

WICKETT. She's that thoughtful for me! My cough keeps her awake six nights out of seven, but she never grumbles. A patient woman and good as gold. It shows she married me for myself, and not for my uncle's money; don't it, George?

[CODD *fills their glasses.*

BONUS. Certainly it do—a very good woman—as women go.

WICKETT. You see I've lost all hope of the money now. [*Laughing.*] Marriage be like mumps seemingly. 'Tis catching. My old uncle's to be wedded, so 'tis good-bye to his cash. Quite a young woman he's took. A most amazing world, as I've often said; haven't I, George?

BONUS. Do your wife know about it?

WICKETT. I told her o' Thursday—broke it to her; and then told my old mother; and then I came in here and told Mrs. Pomeroy. And now I don't care

who knows it. And my Jill took it that quiet and brave without a pinch o' fuss—like the rare girl she be. "I married you—not your money," she said to me, without turning a hair. I'm sure I don't know what I did to win such a wife. But when I'm well and strong again, I'll make it up to the woman.

Enter CAWKER.

CAWKER. Cheero, boys! Did I hear the noble name of "woman" in your mouth, Sammy?

WICKETT. My wife 'twas, Moleskin. Of course, I wouldn't praise any other man's wife. Because that wouldn't be proper.

[WICKETT *coughs, goes to the fire with his glass and sits on the settle.*

CODD. Cuss all women—crooked, shifty wretches!

CAWKER. 'Tis a wonder they haven't wrung your neck for you afore now, Codd.

CODD. Women be a devilish invention. You can break in their bodies—not their hearts. You've got to watch 'em as if you was a tiger-tamer. Take your eye off for a second and they'll pounce and tear your soul out.

WICKETT. That's going too far, Emmanuel. I'm sure no woman born would tear a man's soul out.

[CODD *helps* CAWKER *to spirits from a special bottle which he takes from shelf and leaves on counter.*

CAWKER. Ah! You're one of the lucky ones, Sammy.

WICKETT. Sometimes I wonder how ever I got the pluck to offer for her. Till I was up home twenty year old, my eyes always watered when I passed a maiden.

CAWKER. Fancy that! 'Twas my mouth always watered when I passed 'em.

WICKETT. I'd blush afore 'em something fearful.

[*Coughs.*

BONUS. Don't you talk; you listen.

CAWKER. 'Tis the surprises in 'em that always drew me. Uncertain as sporting. A wonderful gamble they be—never so near as when they furthest off, and never so far off as when they be in your arms with their lips on your cheek.

CODD. Claws of Satan—every one of 'em!

CAWKER. Have a drop along with me, you chaps. You can carry another, Sammy. You want uplifting. That cough shakes you like a leaf. Give him three fingers, Codd.

WICKETT. Be I up for another, George?

BONUS. Yes—for once in a way.

CAWKER. You must take more pride in yourself, Sammy. You're a very good man—so long as you've got a better to watch you. And when all's said you'll make so fine a meal for worms as the best among us.

[*Slaps him on the back.*

WICKETT. I may or I may not, though 'tis very kind of you to praise me, Moleskin.

[CODD *pours out more drink.*

Enter NICHOLAS TOOP *in uniform.*

CAWKER. Ah! Here's policeman Toop, to tell us 'tis closing time. We be all safe, thank the Lord, while he walks and watches.

CODD. [*To* CAWKER.] You deep scoundrel! A disgrace to the police you be, and well may you laugh at 'em. If they was worth their salt they'd have catched you red-handed twenty year ago.

CAWKER. [*Laughs.*] Do 'e hear this old fool, Nicholas?

CODD. A disgrace, I say—like a plague they can't cure be a disgrace to the doctors.

CAWKER. Ha-ha! Catch me first and cure me afterwards, as the haddock said. [*Winks at the policeman.*

TOOP. We'll take you yet, Moleskin, and I hope I may be the man to do it.

CAWKER. I hope you may, I'm sure I hope you may, Nicholas. 'Twill be a great feather in your cap, but 'tis very unlikely. For why? I'm as honest as a bird on a bough. And so be you, ban't you, Sammy? Just the sort of chaps—you and me—to go fox-hunting with a flock o' sheep!

WICKETT. No, no, I won't neighbour along with you, Moleskin. I'm a very respectable young man, and always first to my bed of a night since I married, ban't I, George?

CAWKER. [*Tolerantly.*] There — there — you run home to your red wife, and tell her to put a mustard plaster on your poor chest.

BONUS. 'Tis time we was away. Get going, Sammy, I'll be after you in a minute.

WICKETT. So I will, then, else my Jill will be worritting. Good-night, gen'lemen all.

TOOP. [*Looking after* WICKETT.] Poor soul. They'll soon put him to bed with a spade.

CAWKER. And what will Jill Wickett do then, fine thing?

TOOP. Marry a man, I should think.

CODD. By name of Nicholas Toop, perhaps?

TOOP. Might do better—might do worse.

CODD. After her a'ready, I daresay—and not the only one. She draws the men like treacle draws the flies.

CAWKER. [*To* CODD.] Dirty inside and dirty outside you be. Always quick to think evil. If you wasn't so old, I'd duck you in the goose pond, Emmanuel, and make you drink a pint o' tadpoles afore I let you out.

[*Enter* MRS. POMEROY *from behind bar. She has shawl over her shoulders.*

CAWKER. Ah! Good evening, missis. You did ought to give this bald, old carrion-crow a pinch of your charity.

TOOP. I do hope you'm pretty clever, ma'am.

[AVISA *gives* TOOP *a small glass of sloe gin.*

AVISA. [*Smiles.*] My heart be growing too old for my body, so they say, Nicholas.

CAWKER. Be growing to big for it, more like. Never was such a heart o' gold afore.

CODD. 'Tis her rambling, wicked son be pushing her downhill.

AVISA. [*Giving* CODD *a drink over the bar.*] Take your nightcap and be off to bed, Emmanuel. I'll lock up to-night.

CAWKER. I'm working steady at Ives. He's mending fast. I led him astray, God forgive me, so the least I can do is to bring him back to the fold again.

CODD. Aye, like the wolf comes back. [*Gets his and prepares to go.*] Us'll live to see you strung up yet, I hope, Nathan Cawker! [*Exit* CODD.

CAWKER. [*To* AVISA.] What a dear old man he is! Your Ives is getting wiser and broader-minded every minute. Mark me, Avisa, he'll be home afore you expect him. I be at him to come home every hour. I give him no rest.

TOOP. There's nought like a bit of a shake up, same as he had, to steady a young youth. And no sensible man will think the worse of him once he shows himself good for something. Well [*drinking his sloe gin*], closing time, souls. Good-night all. [*Exit* TOOP.

CAWKER. I'm going trout-fishing to-morrow, thank the Lord! [*Lights pipe and puts matches in his pocket, also sugar and a lemon.*] Good night, and get well quick, Avisa Pomeroy. Women like you be growing terrible scarce in the land. Come on, George.

[*Exeunt* CAWKER *and* BONUS.

[AVISA *puts out the swinging lamp over the bar. She is tremulous. She goes to door and listens. Then she mends the fire and kneels*

by it, her senses alert. IVES POMEROY *comes in. She hears him and rises.*

IVES. Have you forgiven me, mother?

AVISA. [*The acute emotion visible when she was alone is hidden now. She is calm and collected before him She smiles.*] My own dear son! [*Kisses him and holds his hand.*] My boy! Supper's in the oven for you.

IVES. You wonder! Nought can change you. Be the girls to bed? I've got a lot to say.

AVISA. They're both to bed. [*Goes to lock the door.*

IVES. Nay; I ban't come to stop to-night. There's a fine adventure afoot.

AVISA. [*Locks the door and smiles at him.*] I've caught my chick now. I knew he'd hop back to his nest again, if 'twas only for the old bird's sake.

IVES. Soon—soon I'll come; but not to-night. A terrible big thing have got to be done to-night. How be you going on? Be you strong enough to hear about it? Did Jill call in a bit ago?

AVISA. [*Sitting by the fire.*] She came.

IVES. [*Looking round.*] I feel as if I'd been away ten year! [*Goes behind bar and gets a drink of ale.*] Have a drop o' brandy afore I speak to 'e, mother?

AVISA. [*Shakes her head.*] Jill Wickett had something on her mind seemingly.

IVES. And well she might. And me too. And you—a wise woman like you—you'll soon see how 'tis between us. I've larned such a lot of wisdom. I be growed from a boy to a man now, mother.

'Twas knowledge hard got; but it won't be wasted. I look back and laugh to think how wrong I was.

AVISA. You'll see life clearer now, Ives.

IVES. So I do then—so clear as the stars. I'm going to right a wrong, mother.

AVISA. 'Tis a great thing to right wrongs.

IVES. [*Coming over to her.*] When Jill took Wickett, I said 'twas like a red squirrel mating with a white mouse. She was wicked to do it, and it couldn't come to no good. And more it did. She did evil and so did I; and we both were punished for it. But I'm a strong man, thank God, though she's a weak woman. She ain't going to suffer no more. 'Tis done, mother. She'll be free afore sunrise!

AVISA. Free!

IVES. And you've got to swear, by the living God, to be our side. But I know you will be. Didn't you forgive Tom Bassett's wife for running away with the carpenter? And didn't you say she was right to leave that drunken, worthless dog, her husband? Jill's suffered—oh, she's suffered, I can tell you! That Samuel! Heaven's the only place for him. She hates him—hates his cough and his weakness and his silliness. Any decent woman would, for he's half a fool. But be one mistake to wreck a whole life? Not if I can help it. 'Tis all in a nutshell, mother. Jill shan't waste herself on that poor atomy of a man no more. She was meant for me, and only me. I've took my own money out of the bank—five-and-fifty pounds. She's being

tortured to death, and I won't endure it another hour; and this very night we be going to eut and run together.

AVISA. [*Shuts her eyes and leans back. Then she sits up, braces herself, and takes a long breath.*] Well, the woman can't do no more than that for 'e.

IVES. Ah! We were wise to trust you!

[*Pause. Then* AVISA *rises and puts her arm on* IVES' *shoulder.*

AVISA. Sit down here beside me and we'll talk about it.

IVES. 'Tis this way: Wickett will divorce her, or else die—no odds which, for his thread be spun, poor wretch; and then I marry her and come home again to you. And a mighty fine daughter-in-law she'll make.

AVISA. You've thought it all out, I see.

IVES. And mind this: she's loved me all along, mother. 'Twas only her people made her take that poor shadow for his uncle's money. She don't want it.

AVISA. She don't want it, because she can't get it, Ives.

IVES. What?

AVISA. Leave that and say all you've got to say.

IVES. You ain't going back on me, mother?

AVISA. Never, while my hands and wits can work for you. You've had sore troubled moments before you came to this. And now I must have some too. I'm a proud woman, Ives, to think you could come back to me—while there was time.

IVES. My mind's fixed. You'll never change it, mother.

AVISA. But you can change it yourself.

IVES. Don't you preach to me to-night—I ban't here for that.

AVISA. I'll not preach. 'Tis a short and sharp business you've planned, my dear—a simple thing, but the simplest things often have a kink in them.

IVES. [*Sitting by her.*] A man have got to show himself a man. Must Jill be denied all happiness for evermore because she's made a mistake? She's young and wants her share of joy. And why not? I be thinking for her, not myself.

AVISA. [*Putting her arm on his shoulder.*] Think for her—that's right. Think deeper yet for her.

IVES. She trusts me like my dog trusts me. And 'tis all over now, anyway. She'll meet me at the Hunter's Cross a bit after midnight. My solemn oath she's got, and I wouldn't go back on it for any living soul.

AVISA. She swore on oath too—in the holy house of her Maker. She's Wickett's wife—before men and God Almighty.

IVES. Forced into it by her folk.

AVISA. Not she! She went her own way and always have and always will. For you to strike such a man as Wickett! For my strong Ives to rob that poor creature! 'Tis like taking away a dying child's toy.

IVES. The woman shan't be tortured no more, I tell

you—not another day! I've gone too far to turn back now, and wouldn't if angels came between.

AVISA. [*Rising.*] Turn back you must, for this is the turning-point.

IVES. Never, mother. My word's given.

AVISA. For her sake, Ives.

IVES. For her sake I'd die sooner! If you but knew what she is.

AVISA. I know her better than you do, my son.

IVES. 'Tis hell to hear one woman fight against another; and I won't hear it. She's first with me now, and will be for evermore. [*Starting up.*] Have you forgot what 'twas to love, mother?

AVISA. [*Gently.*] Not I—else I'd not be here now, Ives. You shall put another first. 'Tis right to lift the sweetheart highest—'tis nature. True lovers be like streams that run together to part no more. They give all, and ask all back. But a mother—'tis her pure joy to give all and ask for nothing. A mother be the bird's wing over her little ones—spread to keep 'em warm and safe till they need it no more.

IVES. Jill only lives for me now.

AVISA. [*Strongly.*] Live for her, then—for her right and her honour and her good name. Be just to her—you that love justice. Look back at what you've learned since last you was under your mother's roof, and list to what your own inner voice be telling you.

IVES. She's mine by all right and reason and always was.

AVISA. Her husband's dying.

IVES. What's his life to me? 'Tis her life I'm fighting for.

AVISA. For my sake, put this away from you, Ives.

IVES. You'll live to be glad I deny you, mother.

AVISA. I've tried and failed then. I'd have lifted you to see the ugly truth if I could. I can't. I don't blame you for that; I only blame myself.

IVES. You'll live to be glad I won, I tell you.

AVISA. 'Tis you would live to be sorry. You've not won, dear heart. You can't win that way. But I'll help you to win yet. I'd have beat you with right if I could [*takes his hand*], but now 'tis with might that I must beat you.

IVES. The might is mine.

AVISA. The might is truth. Come close to me. I'm going to hurt my boy now.

VES . [*Sitting beside her.*] You'll never hurt me no more, mother. I'll never quarrel with you no more.

AVISA. When did Jill say she'd run away with you?

IVES. Last Thursday night.

AVISA. But you'd asked her before?

IVES. A score o' times, and I ban't ashamed of it.

AVISA. 'Twas on the morning of Thursday that Samuel Wickett heard his old uncle was going to wed again.

IVES. Wed again! 'Tis a lie!

AVISA. Ask Samuel. And that decided her—not your prayers. Jill's deeper far than you, and looks

further ahead. It hurts me to strike the woman behind her back, but——

IVES. She couldn't do nothing like that. [*Pause.*] Oh God, mother, how can you think so bad of her? 'Tis cruel of you!

AVISA. Cruel? Not I. I mean nought but kindness. Hark to me, that never spoke a word to you without love. She's treated you evil; and I say "return good for evil." Save her from herself, Ives.

IVES. I won't believe she knew.

AVISA. You must. She's a very witty girl—cautious—and far-sighted.

IVES. There be none to fight her battles but me.

AVISA. She can fight her own battles far cleverer than you can. Did she trust you? Tell me that. Did you get so much as a kiss till Sam told her the money was gone? One kiss, Ives? Speak the truth to me. [IVES *is much agitated.*] Wasn't it her that offered to run away? I think it was.

IVES. [*Angry.*] I'll go and strangle her——

AVISA. Don't you do that. Any fool could do that. The big way—your way—is to leave it once for all; and she'll know bitter well why you have. 'Tis right she should smart a bit for this. 'Twas a mean thought and far ways off justice and plain dealing to slight you so and flout her poor man's honour. Let the night air cool her; let the Hunter's Cross talk to her—and the moon and the stars. Let the light o' dawn creep to her presently—not you. 'Twill show her the same sad, ugly things that I've

been showing you. You be wise, and go to your bed and forgive her. Aye, let your strength forgive her weakness, my son. Let her find that you wasn't the sort to be played with. Let her know what she's lost.

IVES. [*Angry and walking about.*] Blast her—cunning devil! I see it now—a lot more than you can see. I'll never forgive her. She may freeze and rot for all I care.

AVISA. Your room's waiting for you up over.

[*Points overhead.*

IVES. Not to help her from hell would I stir now. God judge me if I'll breathe the same air with her again. To think she could trick a man like me! And I'd have given my life up for her!

[*He goes out behind bar. His mother collapses for a few moments. Then she takes the brandy bottle, pours brandy into a glass, mixes it with water and drinks it. She listens awhile, looks upward and hears* IVES *trampling overhead in his room. She carries the light from the mantelshelf to the edge of the counter nearest the door. Then she unlocks and opens the door. She puts her shawl over her head, extinguishes the lamp and goes out into the night, shutting the door behind her. Overhead there is still heard the trampling of* IVES.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: *The bar of "The Green Man" as before. The stage is dark; the time is dawn. Two months have passed since the events of the previous act.*

[EMMANUEL CODD *opens door at the back of the bar and enters. He lifts flap of counter and shuffles about. He goes to window beside the door on the left of the bar, opens shutters, and admits a stream of red morning light. The bar is untidy as it was left overnight. A peat smoulders on the low fire.* CODD *mends the fire and begins to sweep the floor. While he is doing so there is a knock at the door. He shows surprise, unbolts the door and flings it open. A great stream of ruddy light breaks through, and in the light appears* JILL WICKETT.

CODD. What the mischief do you want?

JILL. Some brandy. There ain't a drop at Stone Park. Sam very near croaked last night. I thought he was gone. But he ain't got the sense even to die, poor creature. Northmore's given us a ticket for the hospital to Tavistock. He goes in to-morrow if they can move him.

CODD. Be the new shepherd come?

JILL. Farmer ain't got one yet.

CODD. Wonder if Northmore would look at me?

JILL. You! A pretty old shepherd you'd make! Shepherd to the beer barrels be your business.

CODD. I'm leaving The Green Man.

JILL. Not you! You'll never go.

CODD. 'Tis that damned dog up over. [*Pointing to ceiling.*] Speak soft, else he'll hear you. Sacked me—sacked me after fifty year of work, with his father and grandfather afore him.

JILL. 'Twill come to nought. You'll stop.

CODD. 'Tis done I tell you. In my rage I gave gave notice again—just a habit I've falled into when that thorn pricks me—and he's took it. And when I went to his mother, she upheld him.

JILL. She's always on his side. She's always fighting the devil for him.

CODD. But I ain't done with him yet. I'll get my knife into the wretch afore I'm gone.

JILL. [*Interested.*] You're not the only one, I reckon. He wants——

CODD. He wants hell; and I be going to give it to him, the Lord helping. Justice be his cry—then let him taste it. I'd lie behind a hedge and put daylight into him if I wasn't so old and near my end.

JILL. What's he done to you?

CODD. Five shilling a week pension—that's what he's done to me. Five shilling a week, after fifty year o' work!

JILL. Give me a drink—I'm thirsty.

CODD. [*Drawing beer.*] An eye for an eye be the law, and a tooth for a tooth. That's justice.

JILL. [*Drinks.*] Here's justice for him then, and ten years in gaol.

CODD. Ah! Can you say that?

JILL. I'm joking. He's nought to me.

CODD. You be the fighting sort that might help an old man.

JILL. I don't want to quarrel with people. I'm a very easy, good-tempered woman, and my poor husband will tell you so, and Ives Pomeroy ought to know, if anybody did. When I be happy, I like for everybody else to be happy; but when I'm troubled, I get wicked and don't care what mischief I make.

CODD. I be the same. That's justice, that is.

JILL. You let Pomeroy alone—he's too strong for you.

CODD. Is he? How if his hay-ricks catched fire some fine night? He's at odds with Matthew Northmore and a score o' men. 'Twould never be guessed who done it.

JILL. [*Laughing.*] You're dull. If I hated a chap, I reckon my wits would work sharper than that.

CODD. What could hit him harder than his hay?

JILL. Why, you want to get him locked up, don't you, not yourself? 'Tis for him to set fire to another man's ricks.

CODD. Ah! If you want to do a bit of proper, clever wickedness, ax a female to help.

JILL. That's true, so I'd best be gone afore you wake the devil in me.

CODD. 'Tis all hiss and no sting with you. What's the use of being a snake if you can't bite?

JILL. I'm no snake—only a terrible unlucky woman.

CODD. You want the fool for yourself—when your husband dies. [*Laughs sourly.*] That's the game; but don't you think it. You won't get him. He laughs at you behind your back and calls you foul names—to please somebody else.

JILL. Does he? If it weren't for his mother——

CODD. What's she to you? Didn't she do her best to keep him from marrying you in the first place? You be frightened to do anything when it comes to a bit o' danger.

JILL. Frightened—me? What have I got to lose—here or anywhere? 'Tis only fear of loss makes you frightened.

CODD. Why don't you have a dash at the rogue and serve him same as he's served other people?

JILL. I wouldn't sink to it. [*Pause.*] But, of course, any fool could see how to do it. Him and Northmore, at Stone Park, are always at each other's throats, like a brace o' dogs, the Lord knows why.

CODD. 'Tis over this here bar-maiden — Ruth Rendle.

JILL. What?

CODD. Didn't you know? Pomeroy's after her now on the quiet. I've marked it.

JILL. You mean that?

CODD. Yes, I do; and seeks to please her by scorning you. That's enough to quicken your wits I should think.

JILL. I wouldn't dirt my hands with the cur. But if I was you—then I should be very like to——

[*Going.*

CODD. What?

JILL. Be very like to remember that he often rides past Stone Park to Amicombe Hill, where the peat works are. And he often comes back of an evening, when the farm be very quiet and the day's work done.

CODD. That's right.

JILL. And, if he was my enemy, I should reckon a chap like him would be quite equal to putting a match to Northmore's big cattle-byre, and then off and away.

CODD. By God!

JILL. And I should have a look round, if I worked here, for his bills and papers.

CODD. No need—he leaves 'em all over the shop.

JILL. A careless chap.

CODD. And then, after the blaze, you find some of his letters, or what not, in the ruins?

JILL. Me! What be talking about? This ain't got nothing to do with me. Don't you drag me in, or I'll tell the policeman. All I say is, that if such a thing did happen, 'tis Matthew Northmore himself ought to find the proofs—not a poor, busy woman with her hands full of work and a dying husband.

CODD. The devil did ought to be proud of you!

JILL. Don't you say that. I'm all right. Nobody have ever catched me in a crooked act, and nobody ever shall. I do to others as I'd be done by. I'm only saying what a bad chap, like Ives Pomeroy, might do.

CODD. 'Twould be a good turn for Northmore too. Once that dog's put away and all's clear for farmer. Pomeroy rides off some fine morning, and then Northmore comes down here after this wench, and you send George Bonus on an errand.

JILL. Not I. I don't have nothing to do with it. I only hope as Pomeroy won't think on such a fearful deed.

CODD. He'll have done it afore Michaelmas.

JILL. Think no more of it, Emmanuel. You're not clever enough, nor yet wicked enough, to manage a job like that. I was only making fun.

CODD. 'Tis fun that'll get the broad arrow on to Ives Pomeroy, I hope.

JILL. He'd look very nice in knickerbockers—wouldn't he?

Enter AVISA *from door behind bar.*

CODD. What was it you wanted, Jill?

JILL. Morning, ma'am. Just a drop of brandy for my poor man. There's none left. They take Sammy to the 'orspital to-morrow.

AVISA. I'm glad he's going.

JILL. And you did ought to go too, ma'am, by the look of you.

AVISA. [*Getting brandy and pouring it into a smaller bottle.*] Nay, nay; I can stand to work still.

JILL. [*Aside to* AVISA.] I shan't forget that night when you came to me at the Hunter's Cross, ma'am, and showed me my duty. I'm terrible unhappy and terrible sorry for all my sins. I wish I was going to die instead of Sammy.

AVISA. Your life's to live. Hurry back to him. [*Gives* JILL *the bottle.*] No—you needn't pay for it.

JILL. Thank you, ma'am. God bless you for all you've done for me. 'Tis a beastly world and full of unkind folk. I hate everybody in it but you.

[*Exit* JILL.

Enter LIZZIE *from behind bar.*

LIZZIE. Mother, you didn't ought to be down yet. Don't you stop here. Ruth's getting breakfast. [*Kisses* AVISA.] How do you find yourself this morning?

AVISA. I slept very well, my dear.

[*Exeunt* AVISA *and* LIZZIE *through door behind bar.*

[CODD *stops sweeping and looks about. Lifts a paper or two on the mantelshelf; then goes behind bar and looks at other papers hanging on a file.*

Enter IVES. *He is in his shirt and trousers, with his braces round his waist. He carries a towel and a cake of white soap.*

IVES. Morning, Emmanuel.

[CODD *looks at him sourly, but does not speak. He is tidying in the bar.*

IVES. I want you. I've larned something since yesterday.

CODD. There's a lot for you to larn.

IVES. Touching your pension, Codd.

CODD. Call it a "pension"!

IVES. You shall have more than I offered. I've talked it over with mother. 'Twas less than the fair thing. I spoke in haste.

CODD. Your way always.

IVES. Well, well, don't growl no more, for God's sake. We shall soon part.

CODD. I won't thank you for anything, if that's what you're after. I've done my duty in your family for fifty year, and if you and your mother be going to do yours—well, 'tis time—and only the justice you're always talking about.

IVES. You was to have had five shilling a week for your life.

CODD. After fifty year o' work!

IVES. But we're going to give you three half-crowns, Emmanuel.

CODD. Three half-crowns! Justice—eh! Three half-crowns for fifty years' work!

IVES. [*Angry.*] Get out of my sight, then—be gone, you thankless dog!

[CODD, *in fear, hurries out, and* IVES *flings his broom out of the door and kicks a bucket out after him.* RUTH *enters from behind bar.*

RUTH. Anything wrong?

IVES. Everything's wrong. What's the use of trying to meet men? Seven-and-six a week for life, and he—there, why should I bother you about it? How's mother to-day?

RUTH. She's a lot happier ever since you've been back; but we must keep her happy, Ives: the happier she is, the better for her. Peace and calm she must have.

IVES. What more can I do? Haven't I said that I'll be the death of anybody that frets her?

RUTH. She's slept well—and she's taking an egg to her breakfast—I made her.

IVES. You're a proper fairy in this house. And you're only paid with trouble. I wish I was so patient as you. 'Tis the people—the people make me mad. I can be so wise and clever as anybody—when I'm all by myself.

RUTH. I know—I know, Ives. 'Twould be so easy to live—if life didn't come between. 'Tis all a battle.

IVES. [*Helping to tidy the bar.*] That old devil, Codd——

RUTH. Never mind him. Smooth out your forehead.

IVES. I've took to thinking a lot about things lately, Ruth.

RUTH. I know you have.

IVES. Nobody's got more to vex 'em than you, come to think of it.

RUTH. Life's difficult even for the least of us.

IVES. So 'tis for anybody who wants to be honest and straight. I can talk to you because—because you understand things. I like to tell you my secrets. I cared a lot for Jill Wickett, you know. I'd have took her away from that poor sick sheep, her husband. I felt she belonged to me somehow. In justice I felt it. We was running off together; but then I found myself up against justice again. At the last minute, when all was fixed up, I heard how Sammy had lost his uncle's money, and she knew it. She offered to run away with me for craft, not for love; and I hated her then, to think how she'd played with me—hard-hearted bitch. And I paid her in her own coin. Women never forgive the chap that finds 'em out. I met her two days agone, and she looked through me, as if I was a pane o' glass. But she's got to hear me afore long. She's got to know why I did it.

RUTH. I don't think she's the sort to bear malice. Live and let live is her motto.

IVES. You say life's so difficult. I wish 'twas in my power to make it easier for you.

RUTH. How kind to wish that, but——

IVES. One man's the trouble. One man makes it hard—eh, Ruth?

RUTH. Don't be angered with him. He can't see what he's doing—poor Matthew. I think sometimes I ought to go. But your mother——

IVES. 'Tis he ought to go—the long-faced monkey. He's plaguing you to death. Ban't just or fair, and I'm itching to tell him so.

RUTH. Don't, don't dream of it.

IVES. My eyes have been opened a lot of late. There's none to stand up for you.

Enter BROWN.

BROWN. [*Takes off his hat to* RUTH.] Good morning. Not dressed, Ives! Is Lizzie going to see me on my way to school?

RUTH. For certain she is, Mr. Brown.

[*Exit* RUTH *into parlour.*

BROWN. All nature rejoices in the morning sunshine; all nature is up and dressed but you, Ives.

IVES. Oh Arthur, how the devil do you keep so well content with everything that happens?

BROWN. I wish I could teach you the secret of a mind at ease.

IVES. You teach me a deuce of a lot of things—not worth knowing.

BROWN. I'm ready and willing to help everybody. I came into the world to help it.

IVES. You're so terrible good. But good for what? Your virtues would sink a ship; but what do you do? You only teach brats and knock all the joy and fight out of them.

BROWN. I knock the fight out of them, certainly. God never made their little hands to double into fists.

IVES. Well, I can't swear at you no more, though I shall laugh at you till my dying day.

BROWN. Only a fool laughs at a wise man, Ives.

IVES. But a wise man is the first to laugh at himself.

BROWN. Thank God I've never seen anything to laugh at in myself.

IVES. I suppose not.

BROWN. I have my share of self-respect, I believe.

IVES. You have, Arthur—and a bit over.

BROWN. And I know whom to thank for my powers.

IVES. But God and Nature ain't the same. 'Tis a question in my mind which be the stronger.

BROWN. That shows weak faith. Nature is only the servant. Heaven is all-powerful.

[*Enter* MR. CAWKER *with an old fishing creel and a rod in three pieces. He has a cast of trout-flies round his battered hat and carries a bunch of primroses.*

IVES. And the Devil? What's the end of him?

CAWKER. The end of the Devil be his tail, my dear.

IVES. Who believes in him now?

BROWN. All honest Christians. We know the Devil better, that's all. We see through him. We understand his dreadful plots upon the soul. If heaven can be within us, then hell can.

Ives. I know that much.

CAWKER. 'Tis too fine a morning for preaching, schoolmaster.

IVES. I want to see justice done in the world.

BROWN. We are all put here to do it and work for it.

CAWKER. We're put here to play, not work. We're

the Lord's children; and don't a parent like to see his little ones having a romp? We'll grow up in heaven—not here. We're the only creatures that drink when we ain't thirsty; the only creatures that play kiss in the ring; the only creatures that can make a joke and see a joke; the only creatures that know how to tell a good sporting lie and stick to it. Think of all that! Let the beasts that perish work; not us fine things with immortal souls.

BROWN. Work is good physic, if nothing more.

CAWKER. But I don't want no physic. I ain't ill. I only ask to run about and play till I drop. The rich people hate me. Why? Because I will do the same as them, and enjoy myself, and get the full taste of life afore I die.

BROWN. Many, like myself, are only happy when engaged in good works, my poor fellow.

CAWKER. Let 'em work if they want to work. We don't even do that. There's thousands crying for work and the world won't give it to 'em.

BROWN. If all men did what was right in their own eyes, what becomes of the State and the Church and our most cherished institutions, neighbour? You forget that man is a fallen creature, Mr. Cawker. We are all born sinners—remember that.

CAWKER. You may have been; I wasn't. I wasn't born a sinner. I was born a babby—so innocent as any kitten, or puppy, that ever came squeaking into a hard world. I ban't a miserable sinner, schoolmaster; I'm a happy sinner.

BROWN. There's a recording angel, as you'll find to your cost some day, my poor soul.

CAWKER. Of course there is—a large-minded chap, no doubt. And d'you think my little sins are going to bother him? A few birds with uncertain owners; and a few salmon coming up from the sea, and a few jokes against my betters, including my Maker—what is it after all? Just schoolboy naughtiness! And won't the angel know it?

[*Enter* AVISA *and* LIZZIE. LIZZIE *has her sun-bonnet on. She comes through hatch of bar.* BROWN *raises his hat to her and bows.* AVISA *stops behind bar.*

CAWKER. Good morning—good morning, ma'am. Your soul shines through your body like the moon through a ghost! I've fetched along these here primrosen for 'e—picked with my own honest hand.

[BROWN *shakes his head to* LIZZIE *and they go out together.*

AVISA. Thank you, Moleskin.

[*Smells the flowers and smiles at them*

CAWKER. With all the dew of the morning on 'em; and now I be wanting a drop o' dew myself.

IVES. Scotch mist, I reckon.

[*Gives him a drink from the little barrel.* AVISA *sits by the fire. She is very weak.*

CAWKER. Pretty drinking! I'll fetch 'e a few sizable trout coming home-along, Avisa. You make her eat 'em, Ives. [*Exit* CAWKER.

AVISA. Don your coat, my dear, and get your breakfast.

IVES. Here's Ruth. You mustn't do no work, mother.

AVISA. I'm very well to-day.

Enter RUTH.

RUTH. Your food's in the fender to keep warm, Ives.

[IVES *nods and goes behind bar.* RUTH *crosses to* AVISA *and lifts the cushions in her chair.*

AVISA. Talk to me a minute, Ruth.

RUTH. How do you feel to-day?

AVISA. The tide be ebbing. I wish—I wish; but 'tis only selfishness. How's Northmore?

RUTH. Just the same.

AVISA. A young chap gets over his love troubles; but such as him—after love's once melted 'em into its mould there's no changing. They'll break, but they can't thaw. I'm very sad for him.

Enter BUTCHER'S BOY.

BOY. Half a pint o' bitter, please, miss.

RUTH. [*Serves him.*] Hullo, Teddy!

BOY. I be going to kill two o' Mr. Northmore's pigs. Just the day for it! [*Drinks.*] Gude morning, miss.

[*Pays for his drink.* RUTH *nods to him.*

[*Exit* BOY *whistling.*

RUTH. [*To* AVISA.] Did I ought to go from here?

AVISA. 'Tis hard to say that. You know what's in my heart. [*Pause.*] The greatest good to Ives. [*Earnestly.*] Go on loving him, for God's sake! Never stop loving him. Oh, woman, he's better than you know! There's good growing in him, like the corn in the earth. 'Tis the weak seedling be best worth tending, for it do often bring the loveliest flower. Much of him be hid from the world, but not from me. He's done proper things that only I know about. He's fighting a good fight. 'Tis my joy to know that you love him so steadfast, and that you could forgive me for finding it out. But no maid could have hid that from a mother's eyes.

Enter GEORGE BONUS.

BONUS. Morning—morning! The usual, please. The weather be going to turn thirsty, I do believe.

AVISA. How's Samuel?

[RUTH *draws beer for* BONUS.

BONUS. Very near died last night—so his wife says. We take him to Tavistock to-morrow, and he'll never come back no more; but he thinks he will, poor toad. Don't know death when he sees it staring at him. His eyes be blinded a' purpose, by the goodness of the Lord. [*Drinks.*] Well, so long. [*Exit* BONUS.

AVISA. I'm a terrible selfish woman where my boy's the matter; but you can forgive me that, Ruth.

RUTH. Forgive you! I'd give my life for you.

AVISA. You can help me now, because you're so

strong and I'm gone so weak. There's no nature in me no more. Be there anything I ought to do? Be there any mortal thing I've missed for him and left undone that's in my power? I often puzzle of a night thinking on it.

RUTH. No—no—'tis very certain you've forgot nothing.

AVISA. There's nought jogs your memory like love. [*Smiling.*] There'll be a good few little surprises for him when I go. I've trusted him in everything, you know, Ruth. He'll feel my perfect trust, won't he? [RUTH *nods.*] 'Tis a great thing for the young to be trusted. It builds up their proper pride. When I was a little wee girl, if my mother trusted me with a parcel, I'd be so proud as a peacock. Go I must, and quickly now, yet I feel 'tis too soon to go from him, Ruth.

RUTH. Don't talk of going—don't think of it.

AVISA. [*Smiling.*] But there—'tis always too soon for a mother to leave her boy. [RUTH *goes over and kisses her. She takes* RUTH'S *hand.*] Be brave and watchful, and, above all, patient. For my sake you will, Ruth?

RUTH. That I will.

AVISA. [*Smiling and taking* RUTH'S *arm.*] God bless you. I wish I could help you too. But we poor women—there's only one rule for us—to put on a brave face and hide our hearts.

[*Exeunt* AVISA *and* RUTH *through the door at back of bar.*

Enter NORTHMORE *and* EMMANUEL CODD.

CODD. Yes, I be off—after more than fifty year. 'Tis his wicked work. He hates truth and honesty and all I stand for; but I'll defy the wretch to his face so long as my tongue can move in my mouth.

NORTHMORE. I heard he was mending and going straight.

CODD. Mending—do a wolf mend?

NORTHMORE. They change their hair—not their hearts, 'tis said.

CODD. A liar and treacherous as the river—laughs at everything that's holy and right—cares nought that his mother be dropping into her grave afore his very eyes. A limb of Satan he is, and don't you trust him, for he's no friend to you, or any other honest man.

Enter RUTH *from behind bar.*

RUTH. Good morning, Matthew. [*Exit* CODD.

[NORTHMORE *shakes her hand without speaking, but looks at her with burning eyes and the unreasoning expression of a fanatic.*

RUTH. 'Tis a beautiful morning.

NORTHMORE. Have you thought of what I said yesterday? Don't put it away—don't forget it. You can't do that. 'Tisn't selfishness in me. I'd live for you if I could; but if that's not to be, I'll die for you. I'm past the selfish stage. I only want

you to be happy and safe and out of reach of them that would do you harm.

RUTH. I know, I know you mean nought but kindness to me, and always have.

NORTHMORE. Then trust me. Leave this place and go out of reach of them all. I hate you to be here—amid coarse, common people. I hate you to serve beer to ploughboys and hear all their beastly talk.

RUTH. You don't know the many reasons—there's Mrs. Pomeroy.

NORTHMORE. Then stop within reach of her. And let me stand between you and the rest. Let me come between. Say "yes" to me, Ruth—say "yes" to me. I beseech it, I implore it! Then you can bide and take care of her while she's so ill. But let me be the shield and the tower of strength; for God's sake, Ruth—for God's sake! [*Takes her hand and kisses it.*

RUTH. [*Withdrawing her hand.*] Oh Matthew—you'll break my heart! [*Weeps bitterly. She has her face down between her hands on the counter, and he lifts his hands over her head yearningly, as though to bless her.*]

Enter IVES *from outer door. He is now completely attired.*

IVES. What's wrong, Ruth? [*To* NORTHMORE.] You again? Haven't you got more sense?

NORTHMORE. I'll not speak to you.

IVES. Then listen to me. Do you know what

you're doing? Have you eyes in your head? Let that woman be cheerful for a moment, and you cloud her; let her find a spark o' joy and you come and put it out. [*Exit* RUTH *through door behind bar.*] You frighten her—like a bully frightens his horse—She doesn't know which way to turn. She— You're no man to do it; and, love her or not, you——

NORTHMORE. [*Furiously.*] Shut your mouth! How dare you talk to me—the likes of you! Is the girl your business—damn you? She's an angel from heaven—that's what she is. How can a thing like you measure a woman like her?

IVES. [*Steadied.*] No; I don't know how good she is. No man knows how good a woman can be. She bides here for my mother's sake—only for that—and she's got no chap to take care of her and warn off them that ban't wanted, so I mean to.

NORTHMORE. You—you canting, crooked-minded trash—you to preach to me! Who are you to dare—? If she understood the truth of you—Herd with your evil kind—you that run after other men's wives!

IVES. Better that than torment a maiden who hates your shadow! Look in your glass, you grey-haired fool! Clear out of this and never come back no more, or I'll hit you down!

NORTHMORE. [*His temper gone.*] You gaol-bird! Touch me, would you? I'm not too old to——

[*Strikes* POMEROY *across the cheek with his whip, as* AVISA *enters from behind the bar.*

IVES *flies at his throat.* AVISA *thrusts between them. They fall apart.*

AVISA. Are you men, or wicked children?

IVES. Keep away!

AVISA. [*Struggling with* IVES.] He's old enough to be your father!

IVES. [*Falling back.*] Them that can give blows can take them.

NORTHMORE. Let him come.

AVISA. [*To* NORTHMORE.] You'll rue this to your dying day.

NORTHMORE. He laughs at my grey hairs—but not at my whip.

IVES. Liar! I never laughed . . . I only——

NORTHMORE. I'd kill you for this if I could!

IVES. You'll kill a woman—not a man.

NORTHMORE. Good God, I——

[*He starts forward and* AVISA *holds his whip and drags it out of his hand.*

AVISA. Shame on you, Matthew!

NORTHMORE. This dirt to preach to me.

AVISA. Shame, I say—what right have you——?

NORTHMORE. Woman, you don't know——

IVES. If you're too old to thrash, you're not too old to hear.

AVISA. List to me——

IVES. Don't hold him, mother. I'll not touch him I'll only smite his ears with truth. Ruth Rendle hates and loathes the man.

NORTHMORE. Am I to suffer this?

[*Starts forward.* AVISA *holds him.* IVES *crosses his arms and doesn't move.*

IVES. Hit me again on t'other cheek. You've got it in your heart.

AVISA. [*Putting an arm on* NORTHMORE'S *shoulder and holding his clenched fist.*] Heed me, heed me, for Christ's sake! Ruth never hated no man. Not built to hate. You're wicked to let Nature break loose from sense.

NORTHMORE. There's some things no decent dog would do.

IVES. And you've done 'em!

NORTHMORE. You poisonous wretch!

AVISA. [*Again coming between them.*] Afore God I order you to cease! [*To* NORTHMORE.] Can such as you—a man that's been a pattern to his neighbours—? No, you shan't go, Matthew; this shan't stop here.

IVES. Let him go and hide himself.

AVISA. Speak no more evil against him. 'Tis you should hide. The man was in his right to come here—where all are welcome.

IVES. Was he in his right to torture a defenceless——?

NORTHMORE. Stop him—shut his mouth, or I won't answer for myself.

AVISA. [*To* IVES.] Give heed to me, while I can speak. For my words will soon be numbered. This man was here on a sacred errand. I name it as I'd

name any other holy thing. You've wounded his heart, but it shan't fester. To Ruth he came——

NORTHMORE. Keep that off your lips, Widow Pomeroy. That's not your business.

AVISA. I'm saying it isn't, Matthew. A secret, sacred thing, between you and her; and for my son to thrust in was madness.

IVES. Let me be mad if he's sane.

AVISA. He answered a boy's folly with a man's anger. 'Tis all the point of view.

IVES. Who'd see a girl sobbing her heart out and not thrust in to help her?

AVISA. If he made Ruth weep, 'twas for other reasons than you know. She's a woman, and woman's tears oft sink deeper than sorrow, and go higher than joy.

NORTHMORE. You were a thief and would be again. This girl—what's she to you? Is she your woman? Since we are to strip hearts, I'll strip mine for your mother's eyes, that know no evil. [*To* AVISA.] I love her and I'm striving with all my poor might to make her love me.

IVES. Love!

NORTHMORE. A sort of love you'll never reach to, nor feel, nor fathom.

IVES. To give a woman hell be a funny sort of way to love her.

NORTHMORE. Not hell—I'd give her heaven if I could, and she'll live to know it. I'm the right and proper man for her. Afore God I am.

AVISA. Then between you and her and her God it lies.

NORTHMORE. 'Tis very strange to speak such things to any living creature. [*To* AVISA.] But you know men. You understand. [*To* IVES.] You angered me past bearing. I forgot your rash nature. You don't know what you do and rush in where angels wouldn't.

AVISA. Leave it there. Our feet stand firm again. My boy made a mistake and he's paid.

IVES. I went to work wrong. I grant that. My business wasn't with you.

NORTHMORE. Then I'll not say less. I'm sorry I fell upon you. I ask you to pardon me.

IVES. I earned it.

NORTHMORE. You're young and strong and your life's ahead of you. The young can afford to forgive. The world's to the young. Passion and hot blood's proper to you. You can carry them, but I—I'm sorry I forgot my age.

[*Holds out his hand.* IVES *takes it.*

IVES. I'm sorry too. 'Twasn't the proper way. I'd no right to come between you—not like that. Forgive me.

NORTHMORE. Anything but there—I'll yield all else but in that quarter. I'm a very patient man—save there. But she—she's above reason—and law—and religion. She's my life. There's nothing in the world that matters but her. I'll atone for striking

you. I'll give myself up if you say so. I'll go before the Justices and be punished for that blow.

IVES. [*Laughing.*] Get home, Matthew, or they'll say you're as mad as me.

NORTHMORE. I'll do good things to you. [*To* AVISA.] I shan't forget this. I'll be his faithful friend.

AVISA. I know it, Matthew, I know it.

[IVES *gives* NORTHMORE *his whip.*

NORTHMORE. I'll do good things, I tell you.

[*Exit* NORTHMORE.

IVES. Poor devil. I'm sorry for him. 'Tis he that's the madman. Thank God you came in, mother, or I should have——

AVISA. Help me! I'm gone weak—I——

[*She falls into his arms and he supports her to her chair.*

IVES. There — there — you're better — say you're better. [*Hastens to bring her drink.*

AVISA. 'Tis nothing. No—I don't want no drink. My boy's my drink. You was patient and brave. I'm proud of you.

IVES. [*Rubbing his cheek.*] I'm learning. Be you better? Your face is awful grey. Just a little drop to please me.

AVISA. [*She drinks.*] Kneel down here a minute. 'Tis well with me, but I can't be here much longer. And full of trust I go—full of trust in you, sonny.

IVES. I've shortened your life—I know that bitter well.

AVISA. You've kept me alive. For you I've gone

on living. But I shan't be far off when I go. The Lord won't take me out of reach of my boy.

IVES. You mustn't go till I've made amends. I can't live without you, mother! [*Pause.*

AVISA. Poor man—poor Matthew. Be gentle and patient with him. He's got to suffer a lot yet.

IVES. Terrible what he feels for her. A tearing, raging thing. His eyes burn when he names her. Can love eat a man alive like that? Poor Ruth! Too good she is even for him—such a wonder as her,

AVISA. She's a very proper girl, and dear to me.

IVES. You always know what a man or woman's good for. You're always right. I've tried to learn a bit from young Ruth.

AVISA. She can teach most men more than they know.

IVES. And more than they thought to know sometimes.

AVISA. She's good to look on.

IVES. I couldn't speak it afore that man. But sometimes—if I dared——

AVISA. [*Concealing interest.*] If ——?

IVES. [*Nods.*] But I don't dare.

AVISA. 'Tis a great thought, Ives.

IVES. She knows too much about me, I reckon.

AVISA. 'Tis them that know but half of you are your enemies. She knows all.

IVES. Who could hope aught for me but you? Who could put faith in me but you?

AVISA. There's always a way for faith and hope—if love be there to light 'em, sonny,

[*She puts her arms round* IVES *and kisses him.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE: *The parlour of "The Green Man." Some slight alterations in the room have occurred since the events of the first act. There is a big black and white crayon enlargement of a photograph of* AVISA POMEROY *on the mantelpiece, in an ugly gold frame. The time is evening, but the inn has not yet closed.*

LIZZIE *is discovered. She is clad in black. She goes to door and admits* MR. CAWKER.

CAWKER. Is Policeman Toop here? He's coming to see Ives about the fire. How's the boy going on now?

LIZZIE. His hand is near well, Mr. Cawker.

CAWKER. I mean his heart, poor chap.

LIZZIE. After mother died he couldn't look forward and couldn't look back. 'Twas terrible. Then he fell deadly silent. Ruth and I were thankful to the fire at Stone Park, for it seemed to wake him up and bring him back to life again.

CAWKER. 'Tis one of God's kindest tricks to help us to forget. Your best friend dies, and you think the world's coming to an end. But it don't, and afore

you can look round, you catch yourself laughing and drinking, just as you did when your friend was alive. The places of the dead be filled up, Lizzie, afore the moss have crept to their gravestones.

LIZZIE. Not always.

CAWKER. I miss your mother cruel every time I come into "The Green Man." 'Twas here she suffered and here she shone. A very rare sort of a woman she was. I know a bit about 'em. She was built on the grand fashion. How she worked for him—your brother. I've seen her weave that chap and Ruth Rendle together with her eyes—back and forth like a flying shuttle—to entangle their hearts if she could.

LIZZIE. [*Nods.*] It will happen. Ruth goes to-morrow; but I think she will be back before long.

Enter IVES *and* BONUS.

LIZZIE. Mr. Cawker to meet Policeman Toop, Ives.

IVES. [*He wears a black band on his coat sleeve and has a quiet and resigned air. One hand is tied up in a bandage.*] See how the new potman's getting on, will 'e. [*Exit* LIZZIE *into bar. To* CAWKER.] We was talking of the fire, Moleskin. If George had only been about, we should have saved 'em; but the damned blackguard who did that bit o' work knew very well the place was empty.

CAWKER. Toop be full of a clue. He's coming in to tell you presently.

BONUS. A cruel calamity.

IVES. The cry of those creatures! Where's

justice? Where was God A'mighty, Moleskin, when those calves were burning to death?

CAWKER. The devil doubles on God sometimes—like the fox doubles on the hounds.

BONUS. I don't know nothing about the devil; but I do know they calves had "Sultan" for a sire, and was worth thirty pound apiece.

CAWKER. How's Northmore took the trouble?

BONUS. I be doubtful sometimes if he ain't going weak in his head.

CAWKER. Drinks now and be wild after a woman. What more can you ask of any honest man? He's your friend ain't he, Ives?

IVES. Be blessed if I know. You'd reckon he ought to be. We made it up for good and all—'twas my mother brought us together three days afore she died. And I was glad to be the one to discover the fire and do my best. But he never even thanked me for what I done.

BONUS. Didn't your arm in a sling speak?

CAWKER. And your mother's death and all?

IVES. 'Tis strange, but she don't seem so dead as she was a month ago. She's more alive to me than half the people in the world.

CAWKER. And well she may be! [*Looks at the picture on the mantelshelf.*] Some be living though in their graves, and some be dead all the days of their life.

IVES. She said that she wouldn't go very far off. I was planting flowers on her mound t'other day. I

could almost hear her heart beating under the grass. [*Pause.*] Come in the bar you chaps, and have a drink.

[*They all go through door into bar. A moment later* LIZZIE *comes in from bar and as she does so there is a knock at the door. She goes to it and admits* JILL WICKETT.

JILL. Good evening, miss. 'Tis Miss Rendle I must see—Mr. Northmore have sent me.

LIZZIE. She's busy packing just now.

JILL. I can wait. There's no hurry.

LIZZIE. I'll tell her, Jill. [*Exit* LIZZIE *upstairs.*

[JILL *looks about her, regards the portrait of* MRS. POMEROY *and other portraits on the walls. Picks up a small Bible from the table and puts it down again in a different place by a chair. There is a knock at the door, but nobody answers it. The knock is repeated, and* JILL *goes to the door.* NICHOLAS TOOP *appears.*

TOOP. Hullo! You!

JILL. Yes, me.

TOOP. I'd rather meet you anywhere but here.

JILL. Why?

TOOP. There's talk.

JILL. And if there is, what's that to you?

TOOP. I'm a policeman, ain't I?

JILL. Ah, 'tis talk you mostly go on. Don't you believe all you hear, Mr. Toop.

TOOP. Ives Pomeroy——

JILL. I ban't here to see him, if that's what you mean. He's nought to me, nor me to him. That's all over long ago.

TOOP. Honest?

JILL. God's my judge. [*Looking at him out of the corner of her eye.*] I shall be a lonely woman pretty soon, without a soul to care for me.

TOOP. Don't say that. I could name a rising young man—I've got a clue to the fire at Stone Park. Single-handed I found it!

JILL. We all know what a clever chap you are. Anybody in these parts?

TOOP. No, no. Us don't do that sort of thing here. A tramp—a foreigner from Exeter. How's your Sammy?

JILL. Flickering like a night-light, that wants to go out and can't.

TOOP. 'Tis the way of a policeman to look all round a thing; and you'll excuse me for naming the subject, but I've looked all round you, Mrs. Wickett.

JILL. Well, I be so good one side as t'other, I believe.

TOOP. You're a masterpiece and who doubts it? But poor Sammy will be gone afore we can blow our noses; and the men will be after you, like hawks after a linnet.

JILL. Not they! Who wants a poor dairymaid, without a penny in her pocket?

TOOP. You've seen more'n your share of trouble, I reckon.

JILL. So I have then. I've had everybody against me. And I've made trouble, too, though God knows I'm innocent of it as a babe unborn.

TOOP. You wouldn't hurt a fly, I'm sure.

JILL. No, I wouldn't—unless it hurt me first. I can't be hit without trying to hit back.

TOOP. Of course. That's your brave nature.

JILL. I met Ives Pomeroy back along, after his mother's death, and we had it out. I tell you these things because you're a kind man and a fine man, and wouldn't do a friendless woman any harm.

TOOP. Had what out?

JILL. A quarrel. He used me shameful and I hit back; but now 'tis all over and we understand each other. And, of course, if such a chap as you is going to be my friend, I don't want to make trouble for other people.

TOOP. You women must be speaking in riddles.

JILL. I only want to do as I be done by, Nicholas.

TOOP. I warrant I could make you happy, Jill.

JILL. I daresay you could if you was to try. Be your lungs all right?

TOOP. [*Striking his breast.*] Sound as a hoss!

JILL. I like you well enough for that matter. You're a man, and what's more, you're a policeman. I might be safer along with a policeman, I reckon—a helpless, simple creature like me.

TOOP. Such a clever woman would be a tower of strength to me, Jill.

JILL. [*Considering.*] Suppose I was to tell you that your clue to the fire was all wrong, Nicholas?

TOOP. What?

[RUTH *and* LIZZIE *descend stairs together.*

RUTH. I'm so sorry, Jill, but——

JILL. 'Tis no odds, I had company. [*To* RUTH *aside.*] Mr. Northmore be riding up this evening afore ten o'clock. 'Tis very special indeed, and he'll thank you to see him—alone.

RUTH. Yes, Jill.

Enter BROWN. *He carries an umbrella.*

BROWN. Am I *de trop?*

TOOP. [*To* JILL.] Come out along with me. I want to hear a bit more about this. [*To* LIZZIE.] You might tell your brother that I've called, miss, but that nought is certain yet. There's mysteries in the air. About the fire I mean.

LIZZIE. I'll tell him, Mr. Toop.

[*Exeunt* TOOP *and* JILL WICKETT.

BROWN. Why isn't that woman at her husband's death-bed? [*Exit* RUTH *upstairs.*

LIZZIE. You're late, dear Arthur.

BROWN. [*Takes out watch.*] I think not, Lizzie. But my visit must be short this evening.

LIZZIE. Oh, dear! Shall I get the dominoes?

BROWN. [*Sitting by the small Bible that* JILL *moved.*]

No, I am not in the mood for games of skill to-night. We will talk. I have been looking ahead.

[*Picks up the little Bible at his elbow.*

LIZZIE. [*Sitting some distance from him.*] You always look ahead.

BROWN. Have you nothing to occupy your fingers, Lizzie?

[LIZZIE *rises, gets some work, and returns to her seat.*

BROWN. [*Turning over the leaves of the book.*] Your mother's Bible, I see.

LIZZIE. Yes, her little one. She's left it to Ruth in her will.

BROWN. Her will caused me a great deal of surprise. However—the book is well thumbed. She was a pious woman—according to her lights.

LIZZIE. Dear mother never talked about it.

BROWN. A great mistake. We should wave the flag of Faith vigorously for all to see—both in and out of season. [*He puts the Bible down beside him.*

LIZZIE. You're so brave, Arthur.

BROWN. Yes, I am brave. And I am also patient. Still patience can be pushed too far, Lizzie. Our nuptials must be celebrated this autumn—I don't propose to wait after the first of October.

LIZZIE. You darling! As soon as ever Ives——

BROWN. I recognize his position. But the future husband must not be sacrificed to the brother.

LIZZIE. No, no. He's so different now—so good and gentle.

BROWN. Always gardening on his mother's grave, I hear. I hope the solemn experience of his parent's death is not merely seed sown on stony ground—I do hope not. It is now eight weeks since the interment, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. Nine, Arthur.

BROWN. Pardon me—eight, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. [*Reflects.*] You're right, of course. I do believe you're faultless, Arthur! It must be so hard for you to feel how different everybody else is.

BROWN. They needn't be—they needn't be. And indeed I'm not faultless—far from that, Lizzie. My weakness is intellectual pride. I catch myself occasionally exulting in my brain power. As for Ives—remorse is a very healthy emotion, though I believe a painful one. Thank God, I was never called to feel it.

[*Enter* IVES *from the bar. He looks at them, sitting far apart, and a passing grin touches his face.*

IVES. Still spooning! What a fiery old devil you are, Arthur.

BROWN. There is an embrace of the soul, Ives. And please don't call me "a fiery old devil."

IVES. But you ought to cuddle her now and again—just for practice.

BROWN. Self-discipline — self-discipline, my poor fellow. [*Gets up and takes his hat.*] Lizzie will tell you that we are not above temporal considerations. I have decided that we wed in the autumn.

IVES. Wait for the frosts! Yours did ought to be a snowy wedding.

LIZZIE. Don't, don't say that, Ives!

BROWN. Good night, dearest one.

[*Kisses* LIZZIE *on the forehead.*

IVES. Well done, Arthur! Afore me too!

BROWN. If we fear not God's eyes, why should we fear a sinful man's?

[*Exit* BROWN.

IVES. Well, you'll have the most wonderful thing that ever walked this earth in a pair of black trousers, my dinky girl!

LIZZIE. He's forgotten his umbrella—fancy that!

[*Takes it and hastens after* BROWN. RUTH *descends the stairs.*

IVES. Done your packing?

RUTH. Very nearly. Where's my little Bible your dear mother gave me? [*Seeks where it was and fails to find it.*] It was here.

IVES. [*At door.*] When I look down on the village I seem to see all mother in one glance, Ruth.

RUTH. Light and warmth she was to them that knew her.

IVES. And now the lamp be out.

RUTH. Only lifted higher, Ives.

[*Seeks Bible but does not find it.*

IVES. 'Tis us be struck to death, not her. Oh, Ruth, Ruth, and me a bad son to her! That rare mother to have such dross for a son— [*Shuts the door and comes in.*] Her work's over. Her beautiful deeds are

all ended now. 'Twas good for the earth that she came on it, Ruth.

RUTH. [*Nods.*] 'Tis sacred ground to us where she went.

IVES. Ruth—now or never—I want—I want to tell you—afore you go. [*A knock at door.*

RUTH. Mr. Northmore to see me, I reckon.

[*Goes to door.*

IVES. Him!

RUTH. [*Returning from door before she opens it.*] Don't go. Speak to him a minute. I want you to—You—you shall talk to me after—if you must.

IVES. You promise?

RUTH. I promise.

[*Goes to door and lets in* NORTHMORE.

IVES. [*In a friendly spirit.*] Here's the man! Come in, Matthew, and— [*Holds out his hand.*] I'm cruel sorry for your trouble.

NORTHMORE. [*Not taking his hand.*] Are you?

[*Shaking his head.*

RUTH. He burned himself all up the arm trying to save your calves, Matthew.

IVES. That was nought. I'm only sorry I come too late. The man that did that job ought to swing for it.

NORTHMORE. You're a hard case, Pomeroy.

RUTH. Matthew!

NORTHMORE. 'Tis all I'll answer. I don't want his friendship. Let him keep away. [*To* IVES.] That's all I ask of you.

IVES. Can you remember the past and say that?

NORTHMORE. It is because I remember the past too well. Couldn't your mother's ghost save you from——?

IVES. [*Angry.*] Keep her off your lips—and me too! For her sake I've done what I did. For her sake I've said no word against your brutal silence. And let this woman witness it. And now be damned to you for a hard-hearted, frozen wretch! I'd sooner home with the foxes than with you.

[*Exit* IVES *into bar.*

RUTH. How could you serve him so?

NORTHMORE. I hate a hypocrite.

RUTH. He's not that, and never was.

NORTHMORE. A hypocrite, and a liar, and bad—bad all through. There's mighty matters afore you now. And ask no mercy for that man, for I'll show none—unless—good money gone—precious beasts destroyed devilish work——

RUTH. Who mourns it more than him? 'Twas only thanks to him that worse didn't happen. He fought the fire for you; he suffered for you; and you couldn't even thank him.

NORTHMORE. [*Wildly.*] The Lord's behind this thing. He's forced your hand, Ruth. The man who set my farm afire was Ives Pomeroy——

RUTH. [*Expresses amazement, which dwindles down into amusement and scorn.*] You're mad! What will you say next, Matthew?

NORTHMORE. Don't laugh, for God's sake. 'Tis no laughing matter.

RUTH. I do laugh ; because you're fooling yourself. I'd sooner believe you'd done it than him.

NORTHMORE. Facts are facts. It's true. He did it.

RUTH. Never—not if an angel said he did.

NORTHMORE. Be just to others as well as generous to him. Listen, and if I say wrong, show me where. On the night of the fire Stone Park was empty, and he knew it would be, for Bonus told him so. 'Twas he, returning from Amicombe Hill, raised the alarm of fire.

RUTH. What more could he do?

NORTHMORE. He could light it first. Look on these things.

[*Brings a large pocket-book from his pocket and produces from it some half-burned papers.*

RUTH. [*Taking papers.*] A piece of a bill from Forster's and—and a bit of a letter I wrote Ives when he went away after the funeral.

NORTHMORE. You didn't think he'd use one of your letters to set my farm alight!

RUTH. What more?

NORTHMORE. D'you want more?

RUTH. Who gave you these?

NORTHMORE. I found them myself. It's proof positive. [*He takes a fancy match-box from his pocket.*] Whose is this?

RUTH. My gift to him on his last birthday. I know he uses it.

NORTHMORE. Yes—he uses it. [*Pause.*] Be just to me. You thought I was babbling just now; but I wasn't. This means—what? There are only three people in the world know that Pomeroy's a wicked scoundrel, and not one more need ever know it. Ruth, I want you, and I swear to God I believe it will be your eternal salvation to come to me. You can save two men before to-morrow. He said that I bullied you sometimes. Never till now; but now—call it what you like. I'm not proud no more. Starving men aren't proud. You must marry me, Ruth; and if I didn't know that you'll live to bless the day when you do, I'd not set this before you. Cruel to be kind. If he's to go free—say so. If he's to have another chance, 'tis only you can give it him.

[*She stares and exhibits acute emotion. The paper and box fall to the ground.* NORTHMORE *picks them up.*

NORTHMORE. Don't think I've come to this easily. I've spent endless night watches on my knees afore my God about it. You love the man—for his mother's sake. Well, these things are all that stand between him and ruin. [*Gives papers and match-box to her.*] There—take 'em. Give him another chance to make good his mother's prayers; be true to him and you'll be true to me, Ruth. I know 'tis your love for him will make you take me, and that's wormwood; but I'll suffer even that, because I'm strong, and patient, and look forward to the time when you'll

love me better than ever you loved him. I'll make you.

RUTH. Can you do this?

NORTHMORE. I must. 'Tis as clear to me as if my Maker had spoke it.

RUTH. Think before you call a woman to such a thing.

NORTHMORE. Haven't I thought? Haven't I fought? Look at my face, Ruth.

RUTH. He never did it. I know him better than you do. It is impossible that man could have done it.

NORTHMORE. Nothing's impossible if it has happened. "You know him"! Do the song-bird know the snake? Little—little you know him!

[RUTH *is greatly moved. For a few moments she sits down. He walks restlessly about, goes to the window and looks out. She becomes conscious of the things in her hands and idly turns them over. She stares at them, plays with the match-box, opens it, strikes a match and lets it burn out.*

RUTH. He never did it!

NORTHMORE. 'Tis proof positive, I tell you. He did it as sure's God's in heaven.

[RUTH *lights another match and after considering sets fire to the papers.* NORTHMORE *turns round and sees what she is doing. He exhibits great joy and hurries forward.*

NORTHMORE. Ruth! My darling Ruth! you mean it?

RUTH. [*Watches paper burn away. Then she takes match-box and flings it into the fire.*] I mean it.

[NORTHMORE *folds her in his arms and utters a wild, inarticulate cry, half sob, half scream. He now grows incoherent.*

NORTHMORE. Thank God! Thank God! Salvation—salvation! You were born to save lives. [*Kneels down and kisses her dress.*] But 'tis God I must kneel to—not to you—not now. [*Rises.*] We'll save that poor boy between us; we'll help on his mother's work; we'll—we'll— Life! Life out of these ashes. Good-bye—God bless you—Goodness is where you go for ever. It trails after you, like the scent of the fern. Let me get away into the night—to shout it out in lonely places. Let the whole world hear it! My darling wife, my own darling wife!

[*Exit* NORTHMORE. RUTH *sits down and hides her face in her hands.*

Enter LIZZIE.

LIZZIE. Closing time. Why! What's the matter, Ruth?

RUTH. [*Starting up.*] Great news—grand news for me. I'll tell you to-morrow.

LIZZIE. It's made you shake and go as white as paper! You look as though—where's Ives?

[*Goes to door into bar and opens it. A babel of voices from bar.*

CAWKER. [*Singing off.*]

"Oh, when I first see Minnie Bell
My heart began to throb, boys,
But she told me to go to——"

IVES. [*Off.*] Shut up, Moleskin, and clear out—'tis closing time.

LIZZIE. [*Returns to* RUTH.] I'm sure there's something troubling you.

[RUTH *shakes her head. Laughter and loud voices from the bar.*

IVES. [*Off.*[Give Moleskin an arm down the hill, George Bonus; he's bosky-eyed.

CAWKER. [*Off.*] Here's George be turned into twins. They can each take an arm. "Oh, when I first see Minnie Bell——"

IVES. [*Off.*] Good night, good night, all!

RUTH. I can't find the little Bible, Lizzie.

LIZZIE. How we shall miss you, Ruth. But—but—I hope——

Enter IVES.

IVES. That new potman's no good. You be off to bed, Lizzie. I want to talk to Ruth.

LIZZIE. Good night, dear Ives. [*Kisses* IVES.] Good night, dear Ruth. [*Kisses* RUTH.

[*Exit* LIZZIE *upstairs.*

IVES. At last. Sit you here now.

[RUTH, *who is in a sort of dream, obeys him, and finds the book that she has been seeking.*

RUTH. Why, here it is!

IVES. Ruth, I meant to say this a month ago—on the day you decided to be off; but I hadn't the cheek. What's wrong? You be wisht to-night. Is it because you're sorry to go?

RUTH. No, no—I'm full of great news—wonderful news.

IVES. So be I. I've been near telling it for half a dozen weeks, but feared to. So sweet and comely as you are, and me such a useless, cranky dog—that I didn't dare. But I loved you long before mother died, Ruth. And more and more ever since—more and more. Be it too late? D'you know too much about all the wicked things I've done? Can you forgive 'em? [*Goes to her.*] Maybe not. But I'll try terrible hard to rise to be good enough for you, if you'll but——

RUTH. I've promised to marry Matthew Northmore, Ives.

IVES. Northmore! Good God Almighty! You can't abide the man!

RUTH. He's faithful and strong and patient. He's won me, and marry him I shall.

IVES. Why? I've a right to know that. It's whispered of late he's going weak in his head. Has he turned you as mad as himself?

RUTH. 'Tis vain speaking against him. He's not mad. I've promised willingly.

IVES. You're a dishonest woman, then. Yes, Ruth. You've kept him on and off, and broke his heart, and drove him to drink, and now—'tis all wrong—

wickedly wrong, and you shan't do it. You shan't wed that broken man. I swear it. I'll swing for him sooner.

RUTH. Ives—Ives!

IVES. [*Angry.*] Never shall you take him! Do you think I'm mad too? D'you think I can't see there's more in this than you'll tell me? I'll have the truth from you, or else I'll strangle it out of him. God's my judge I'll end his days afore he shall touch you.

RUTH. Don't, don't talk that way! I'm doing what I know to be right and wise.

[*Rises and picks up the Bible.*

IVES. To hell with the whole pack of you! To hell with your gentle looks! To hell with what you made my poor mother hope, and what she whispered to me one hour before she died. 'Twas thus with t'other one; and now 'tis you——

RUTH. [*Going to him.*] This isn't, Ives; this isn't——

IVES. [*Snatching Bible away from her.*] Don't you touch that book while you lie to me and say you're doing right to wed that man! The blood in your veins is crying out that 'tis a lie! 'Tis natural you should hate me—but, my God, you shan't love him! Blast the Book and—and— [*He flings it violently to the ground.*] Let it rot there, if it can't keep you from lying!

RUTH. Your mother's Bible, Ives.

IVES. [*More gently.*] Ruth, Ruth, don't say you love him, for I know 'tis false. And if you don't love

him, how can the honest likes of you wed him? Think better of it. Forget me—I'm worthless and I know it. But don't go to him. 'Tis ruination if you do that.

[RUTH *picks up the book, which has come out of its cover. She also picks up a paper that has fallen out of it.*

IVES. [*More gently.*] I must choke you off Northmore—not for my sake but your own. I—I didn't mean to rage. I'm sorry. I forgot where I stand.

RUTH. [*She is looking at the paper that fell out of the Bible.*] Have you seen this?

IVES. I be only set on your good now—'tis only for you, Ruth.

RUTH. You must read this paper. 'Twill mean a lot to you.

IVES. My mother loved you, Ruth, and——

RUTH. I know that.

IVES. If she was here——

RUTH. She is here! List to her, Ives! Forget me and think 'tis her speaking to you—words all copied from the Book.

IVES. She would never have let you do this.

[*He walks about in deep distress.*

RUTH. Listen—listen what your mother set down. 'Twas not for nought it came to us to-night, dear Ives. [*She goes to lamp.*] The first page is old—as old as you are. [*Reads slowly.*] "*God hath judged me and hath heard my voice and hath given me a son.*" You were a baby when she set that down.

IVES. Better for her if I'd never come into the world. [*Pause.*

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*God be gracious unto thee, my son.*" And then, "*His mother made him a little coat.*"

IVES. [*Slightly interested, stops in his tramp up and down.*] Aye, she did. I mind it yet—a little flea-coloured coat when I was a nipper.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*What shall I do for my son?*" "*Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*"

IVES. When my father went.

[*Walks up and down again.*

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*Chasten thy son while there is hope.*"

IVES. Little hope she had o' me.

RUTH. [*Reads*]. "*And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit and was in the deserts.*" . . . "*See, the smell of my son is the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.*"

IVES. [*Calmer. He sits down.*] 'Twas when I took to farming after father died. She joyed in it.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.*"

IVES. Ah, I hadn't begun to break her heart then.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*Master, I have brought unto Thee my son. Master, I beseech Thee look upon my son.*"

[*Pause.*

IVES. Go on.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*Lord have mercy upon my son.*"

IVES. I laid in clink that night.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*As one whom his mother com-*

forteth, so will I comfort you." 'Twas when you came back to her.

IVES. Aye—she comforted me—and more than that.

RUTH. [*Reads.*] "*O turn unto me and have mercy upon me; give Thy strength unto thy servant and save the son of Thine handmaid.*"

IVES. Well she might pray for help.

RUTH. And was answered. [*Reads.*] "*For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*"

IVES. She spoke too soon.

RUTH. She knew you better than you know yourself. There's but one text more. You might think she felt 'twas going to be the last. [*Reads.*] "*He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.*" 'Twas her good-bye to you. She trusted you to her God.

IVES. Give me the paper.

RUTH. [*Tenderly.*] Stepping-stones in your life, Ives.

IVES. [*Taking paper and speaking very slowly and solemnly.*] That woman's son have got no choice.

RUTH. 'Tis like finding precious things that the dead have hoarded away for you.

IVES. She ban't dead! She's here along with me now. [*Pause.*] Do you want to marry that man?

RUTH. Yes, I do.

IVES. Before your God?

RUTH. Before my God.

IVES. Then I'll work him no harm. He must be a good chap if you can say that. He's steadfast and he's brave and he's better than me. He knowed your glory and value from the first—long before I did He deserves you better than I do. 'Tis justice. You'll make him wise again; and he'll make you happy.

RUTH. Good night. Try to——

[*Approaches him*

IVES. Good night. Go—go—go!

[RUTH *takes the little Bible and ascends the stairs.* IVES *moves here and there restlessly. Then he looks at the paper in his hand. There is a knock and* NORTHMORE *enters. He is haggard and hatless.*

NORTHMORE. You ban't to sleep? [IVES *shakes his head and puts the paper into his pocket.*] My mind was running on so—I'd planned a piano for her and all—and proper painted pictures. I was going to fill Stone Park with beautiful things for her.

IVES. So you will—'tis right you should. You've won her, and them that can't win must learn to lose.

NORTHMORE. That's true. I've got a loaded pistol in my pocket.

IVES. Why for? To blow my brains out? Sit down, man, and calm yourself. What more d'you want? She's took you for love.

NORTHMORE. For love—yes, but not for love of me.

I've spun a great web and caught myself in it. No man can face this and live. [*Shows pistol.*

IVES. You're sick, you're dreaming, Matthew. Here, calm down and tell me what's wrong. I'll take that. [*Takes pistol and puts it on the mantelshelf.*

NORTHMORE. Your mother told me that you and Ruth were dew-drops on a leaf, and would run together when the morning wind awoke. Emmanuel Codd fired my farm—not you.

IVES. Me! Hell, Matthew—! What are you saying?

NORTHMORE. He confessed it to a woman after he'd done it, and she's let it out now he's disappeared. This very night she told Nicholas Toop, and he made her tell me. They stopped me as I was going home—to praise God for His goodness. That red woman, Jill. Where's Ruth?

IVES. To bed.

NORTHMORE. Call her down. She loves you as never a girl loved a man afore.

IVES. [*Stares at* NORTHMORE. *Then goes to the staircase and ascends a few steps.*] Ruth, I want 'e.

NORTHMORE. Be there mortal man that can live beside that woman and not want her?

[RUTH *appears and descends the stairs.*

NORTHMORE. [*To* RUTH.] 'Tis all over. He'll tell you. The dream's ended. You're free.

RUTH. Thank God you know the truth.

NORTHMORE. I believed my eyes; you believed

your heart. And you were right. Now I'll be gone.

IVES. You're honest and just—all men know that. Wilt drink? You're shook up seemingly. [NORTHMORE *shakes his head.*] Come on then. I be going to see you home to-night. [*Exit* NORTHMORE.

IVES. [*To* RUTH.] Bide up for me.

[*He puts on his hat and follows* NORTHMORE. RUTH *stands at the open door and looks after them.*

CURTAIN

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THE SECRET WOMAN

CHARACTERS

ANTHONY REDVERS, *of Harter Farm*
JESSE REDVERS } *his sons*
MICHAEL REDVERS
NATHANIEL TAPP } *labourers at Harter*
JOSHUA BLOOM
WILLIAM ARSCOTT, *veterinary surgeon*
JOSEPH WESTAWAY, *of Watchett Hill Farm*
TOBY HANNAFORD
NED PEARN
HALF A DOZEN OTHER MEN } *who came to the meeting of Mr. Westaway's creditors*
AND TWO WOMEN
A POLICE INSPECTOR AND
TWO CONSTABLES

ANN REDVERS, *wife of Anthony*
BARBARA WESTAWAY } *daughters of Joseph Westaway*
SALOME WESTAWAY
SARAH TAPP, *wife of Nathaniel*

(One year passes between Act II and Act III)

The scene is in and near Harter Farm in the Dartmoors

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION AT THE KINGSWAY THEATRE, ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH, 1912

ANTHONY REDVERS	CLAUDE KING
JESSE REDVERS	HUNTER NESBIT
MICHAEL REDVERS	HAROLD CHAPIN
NATHANIEL TAPP	E. H. PATERSON
JOSHUA BLOOM	WILLIAM FARREN
WILLIAM ARSCOTT	HORACE HODGES
JOSEPH WESTAWAY	CHARLES DALY
TOBY HANNAFORD	J. E. DANIELS
NED PEARN	ALLAN WADE
POLICE INSPECTOR	TOM MOWBRAY
ANN REDVERS	JANET ACHURCH
BARBARA WESTAWAY	ESMÉ HUBBARD
SALOME WESTAWAY	IRIS HOEY
SARAH TAPP	MRS. A. B. TAPPING

ACT I

SCENE : *The kitchen of Harter Farm in the Dartmoors. A white-washed room with large, open hearth, on which a fire burns. A flight of stone steps descends into the kitchen. At back, open two windows with deep embrasures, wherein are set pots of geraniums and succulent plants. On the left there stands a tall dresser with 'willow pattern' and other blue and white crockery. Beside the stairs, there stands a 'grandfather' clock. From the ceiling suspend hams, tied up in canvas, and a few bunches of herbs in muslin bags. Upon the mantelshelf are arranged various bright canisters of tin and brass and a piece of ornamental crockery at each end. Above, against the wall, hang a gun and a whip or two on a rack, a pair of spurs, and an old powder-flask. On one side of the mantelshelf hangs a fox's mask with a grocer's almanac under it; on the other side, a stuffed badger in a glass case. Upon the hearth are pots and pans. A long, bare, deal table runs down left of centre and benches stand on each side of it. There is a smaller table between the windows with a board and rolling-pin, a flour-dredger and a jar or two upon it. A pail, brooms*

and dusters litter the floor. A settle stands at right angles to the fire.

[JOSHUA BLOOM *and* SARAH TAPP *discovered.*

BLOOM. The days of peace are over.

SARAH. [*Rolling pastry.*] That's like you men! That's the thanks a woman gets. The missis goes to nurse her sick mother and all of us be sheep without the shepherd while she's away. Yes, all of us, Joshua Bloom—from her husband downward. And now, because she's coming back——

BLOOM. You know what I mean.

SARAH. Yes, I know. A woman like Ann Redvers do gall the common sort a bit. You want to be fine yourself to mark her fineness.

BLOOM. Well, you'd best to tidy up this here rogue's roost of a kitchen afore she comes home, else you'll hear more about her fineness than like. [*A whistling heard.*] Hark to master! When she's away, he wants her home again; when she's home, he'll soon want her away.

[*Enter* ANTHONY REDVERS.

REDVERS. William Arscott be riding down the hill, Joshua. Get over to him and take him to the stable. The mare's better since morning by the look of her.

[*Exit* BLOOM.

SARAH. Lucky for her! I pity any beast that gets into that hateful hoss doctor's hands. He's harder than moorstone—that man—for the granite lets the moss live on it.

REDVERS. You're not fair to him, Sarah. He's only hard outside.

SARAH. Hard, hard all through. We women know. Ax Barbara Westaway.

REDVERS. She might have done worse than take him when he offered; for, if she had, the family wouldn't be in such a tight place as it is now.

SARAH. 'Twill be the workhouse for 'em all.

REDVERS. Nonsense, nonsense! They've some good friends yet. And the girls are both fighters. Where's Jesse and Michael got to?

SARAH. Michael have gone to catch a trout for his mother's tea. Jesse's reading by the waterfall.

REDVERS. Dash that chap! He'll be reading when the Trump of Doom sounds.

SARAH. Same as you'll be whistling, master. No doubt each human creature will be surprised following out his habits. And that's a sure reason why us should have good habits and not bad. Not much hope for them as be catched red-handed in wickedness at the Last Trump.

REDVERS. You preach another time, Sarah, or you'll be catched red-handed in this muck of a kitchen. 'Tis the missis, not the Last Trump be coming. [*Enter* JESSE *with book.*] You'd best to put that book away, Jesse, and buzz about. Mother'll be home by tea-time and I've got fifty things to do yet afore then. [*To* SARAH.] Has Nathaniel started with the trap?

SARAH. He was away an hour agone.

JESSE. I met Barbara Westaway this morning, father. The Westaways are coming over presently.

REDVERS. Ah!

JESSE. They know that mother's due back, and they're set on bringing a little gift to mark her home-coming.

REDVERS. [*Whistles while* JESSE *speaks, and goes on whistling a few notes after he has finished. Suddenly he stops and speaks.*] How would it do if we asked 'em to tea?

JESSE. Why not?

SARAH. Haven't you got more sense? Be it likely that missis will want a pack of strangers?

JESSE. They're not strangers.

REDVERS. Sarah's right all the same. 'Twouldn't do. [*Passes flowers in window.*] I wish that geranium had blowed for her—the white one she's so fond of; but flowers don't care no more for people than bees do for Sunday. [*Exit whistling.*

[JESSE *sits down by the fire and lolls back with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth. He takes a feather from a tin of feathers on the mantelshelf and cleans his pipe.*

SARAH. Now don't you sit caddling there, Jesse—it ban't the time for it. I want your room, not your company.

JESSE. There's an hour yet.

[*Enter* MICHAEL.

SARAH. Hast caught a fish for mother, Michael?

MICHAEL. Yes, I have—a whacker; a good half-pound he runs. She'll have it fresh as fresh. I be going up over to meet the trap in a minute.

SARAH. 'Tis a red-letter day. I always vow that this house be like a corpse without her.

[*She begins to tidy up, and* MICHAEL *helps her for a time.*

MICHAEL. So 'tis then; father's nought when she's away. All he does be to make bad bargains. 'Tis my mother has the brains, Sarah.

[*Stops helping* SARAH, *takes a whip from the bracket above the fireplace and prepares to mend it at the table. To do so he brings cobbler's wax and whipcord from a drawer in the dresser.*

JESSE. [*Shutting his book and flinging it across into the settle.*] That's foolishness, Michael. I know mother's wiser than the run of women, and watchful for father, and a saint of God if you like; but in brains—no. Father's first there.

MICHAEL. I like father well enough—as well as you like mother anyway; but mother's the light of this house. And if you be going to speak against mother, Jesse, don't you do it afore me. I care for her better than you do, and you're jealous of me, because she loves me best.

SARAH. Hush, you boys! Go an' get your fish, Michael, and be quiet.

MICHAEL. I won't hear mother run down by him, or anybody on God's earth.

JESSE. D'you think I mind because mother likes you best? Why, 'tis the proper thing. You're all mother through and through—save in wits. And I'm father over again. He understands me.

MICHAEL. If he do, you're about the only thing he does understand.

JESSE. [*Starting up.*] You're a wicked rascal to say that! But you shan't anger me with with your trash. I see your game; you want to drive me out of my father's house and be free of me. Well, it may happen that way. I don't love Harter, and I don't love you.

MICHAEL. [*Passionately throwing down his whip.*] Jesse, Jesse! You'll drive me mad! Ban't you my elder brother? God, He knows I never thought of such a thing—never.

JESSE. Oh, shut up—here's Arscott.

[*Enter* WILLIAM ARSCOTT.

ARSCOTT. Where's the whistling man?

MICHAEL. Gone to look for the hoss-doctoring man, I reckon.

JESSE. Father was here a minute ago.

ARSCOTT. Well, give me a drop of cider and then I'll away. Can't wait for him.

[*Exit* SARAH *scowling at* ARSCOTT.

MICHAEL. They don't call you Busy Billy for nothing, Mr. Arscott.

ARSCOTT. No, my son, they do not. I'll send over

a ball for the mare. There's nothing much wrong. Don't work her till I've seen her again.

MICHAEL. [*Looking at* JESSE.] Father thought she was going to die.

[*Enter* SARAH *with jug and mug on tray.*

ARSCOTT. And you'd like to put a pinch of poison in it, wouldn't you, Mrs. Tapp?

SARAH. I say you're hard and I know you're hard.

ARSCOTT. Must be 'ard if you want to be 'appy. Good luck, ma'am, I'd sooner have this tap than yours.

[MICHAEL *laughs.* ARSCOTT *drinks.* REDVERS' *whistle is heard. He enters as* ARSCOTT *puts down mug.*

ARSCOTT. [*Shakes hands.*] Well, Redvers, your mare ban't going home this time.

REDVERS. Bother the mare, Billy; what's this I hear tell about Joe Westaway?

ARSCOTT. How should I know? That he's a silly old fool and wants it both ways, perhaps. But you can't eat your cake and have it too. 'Tis time a few of us saw our money.

REDVERS. Don't you be too short with the man. He's done a lot of good in his time.

ARSCOTT. If you was a creditor, you wouldn't be so large-minded.

MICHAEL. 'Tis all very well to give the children pennies, when you're owing the fathers pounds. That's what Mr. Westaway does.

ARSCOTT. [*To* MICHAEL] Ah! You're the chap for

me! Money's money, and he's got to face the music —like the rest of us.

[*Exit with* MICHAEL. JESSE *goes back to his book.*

SARAH. A holy terror that man! He'd sell the primrosen off his mother's grave. Poor old Joe won't have a shirt to his back when Arscott have done with him.

[*Picks up broom and dusters and goes upstairs.*

REDVERS. There's no credit for being generous now-a-days. In fact there's no credit for anything.

JESSE. [*Putting down book.*] Why does mother like Michael better than me, father?

REDVERS. Stuff and nonsense!

JESSE. He's little better than a fool sometimes.

REDVERS. Michael's no fool. He's your mother again. You and me ban't quite so hard at the edges as mother and Michael—more like to be broken in consequence. [*Whistles gently.*

JESSE. I don't care—so long as I am your favourite.

REDVERS. There's the Westaways! [*Goes to the door as the Westaways pass the window.*] Come in, come in. [*He throws open the door.*

[*Enter* JOSEPH WESTAWAY, *with* BARBARA *and* SALOME *behind him.*

REDVERS. Why! Here's a fine sight for sore eyes! How's yourself, flock-master?

[*Both* JESSE *and* ANTHONY *show great pleasure. They all shake hands.*

WESTAWAY. Under the weather a bit and I won't

deny it. 'Twill come right no doubt, but the means be hid from me for the minute. No matter about my troubles. Your missis be coming home, so nought would do but Salome must pick her a gert bunch of bluebells and Barbara fetch along a brave pair of ducks. 'Tis coals to Newcastle, as I told 'em.

[JESSE *takes the ducks from* BARBARA *and the bluebells from* SALOME.

REDVERS. Far from it, Joe. She'll be properly pleased, I promise you.

JESSE. We'll get some water for these, Salome.

SALOME. Will this jug do?

[*Goes to dresser and takes a jug from it.*

JESSE. Mother's fond of bluebells.

[*Exeunt* JESSE *and* SALOME.

WESTAWAY. [*Sitting in armchair by the fire, as* REDVERS *directs.*] Far be it from me to throw a shadow on the day; but things be at a climax to Watchett Hill, my dear.

REDVERS. So I hear; and I don't believe it.

BARBARA. You ask Busy Billy.

WESTAWAY. Who'd have thought such things could hap? A good while ago we was cornered for money here and there, and so I just up and signed a few documents. 'Twas as easy as shelling peas, Anthony, and I made up my mind, very steadfast from that moment, that my beautiful girls shouldn't be pinched —not so long as I could put my hand to a document.

REDVERS. A pity 'twas Arscott you went to.

WESTAWAY. Why? The man thought the world of

me and my family. He offered ten year ago for Barbara!

BARBARA. You didn't ought to mention it, father.

REDVERS. Everybody knows it, my dear.

WESTAWAY. And he kept single for ever after, because she couldn't do with him. But I could; and knowing him for a very deep and clever chap, where money was the matter, I went to him, 'in a large spirit, and he met me in the same—so I thought at the time.

BARBARA. Three hundred we borrowed from him on a mortgage.

WESTAWAY. And now the money have mounted up something shocking.

REDVERS. Didn't you pay no interest?

WESTAWAY. Certainly I'd meant to do so. But it slipped my memory, along of one thing and another, and he was too much the gentleman, as I thought, to name it. And what with standing him treat at 'The Hearty Welcome' and 'The Green Man'—scores and scores of times; and what with sending him many and many a good goose and turkey; and what with fresh eggs and a bit o' cream and so on, I thought it would turn out all right. Then, being uncommon short, I offered to put my hand to another document again—last week 'twas—and, to my surprise, Master Billy went so nasty as a rat in a trap and forgot all about they geese and turkeys and free drinks and all! Properly mazed I was. You see my interest have gone on compounding all by itself.

That's the worse of money! it won't stand still. It always runs from you, or to you.

REDVERS. True enough, Joe.

BARBARA. And now father will mighty soon be a flock-master without any flock.

WESTAWAY. And a farmer without any farm.

REDVERS. 'Tis a thousand pities you let the interest go.

WESTAWAY. So 'tis then. And us have got to take the boots and shoes out of the bread-and-butter at Watchett Hill in consequence—ain't we, Barbara? But next year will see us righted, I hope. We be going to retrench.

BARBARA. If there was vartue in a word, we'd soon be easy. 'Tis 'retrench' with father from morn till night now.

REDVERS. The thing is to do it.

WESTAWAY. Dallybuttons! And don't I do it? Like a hawk I be grown. Why, I'll snap the sugar-basin off the table if I think my maidens be making too free—aye, and the teapot, too! I tell 'em to go out in the hedges and gather marjoram and brew herby tea—same as our grandmothers did.

BARBARA. Billy Arscott's the danger. The others be a kindly lot.

[JESSE *enters with* SALOME. *Both are downcast.*

WESTAWAY. I don't want mercy nor nothing like that. I've gived and gived all my life, Redvers, and if there's none to give to me in my turn—why, I can go without. I'm a patient old blade, as we all should

be at seventy; but justice—justice I've a right to claim.

JESSE. Just the one thing you can take your oath you won't get, Mr. Westaway.

WESTAWAY. Don't you be so acid at your time of life, my son.

REDVERS. [*Impulsively, after looking at* SALOME.] Well, come in here with me, Joe—in my workshop. I'm wishful to hear a bit more about this. Don't you go, you girls; I shan't keep him long. [*Aside to* SALOME.] Bide a bit.

BARBARA. Where's Mrs. Tapp to?

REDVERS. She's busy sweeping and garnishing. The missis was due at Okehampton afore five. Tapp's off to fetch her. Come on, Joe.

JESSE. Sarah's up over, Barbara.

BARBARA. Then I'll run and see her. [*Goes upstairs.*

REDVERS. This way, master.

[*Exeunt* REDVERS *and* WESTAWAY.

SALOME. There, mind you tell her I picked 'em for her.

[*Puts jug of bluebells on table.*

JESSE. You don't answer me—you must do that at least, Salome. You know how things are with me. It's like coming alive out of death when I'm alone with you for a moment. Oh, Salome, why not, my pretty bird? But you say nought—and no news isn't good news when a chap's courting.

SALOME. [*Treating* JESSE *as if he were a boy.*] I'm not for a husband, my dear. We must be sensible.

'Tis all the poor can be. No time to think about marrying. My sister and me have got to keep father out of the workhouse somehow.

JESSE. If I could only help!

SALOME. You can't. None can, so we must stir ourselves.

JESSE. If I had money!

SALOME. If—if! Nobody's got no money here, but Arscott. He's made of it.

JESSE. My father's well to do.

SALOME. Long may he bide so.

JESSE. I hope Arscott will be generous.

SALOME. Not him! I reckon my father can show him where that road leads.

JESSE. I'm such a useless brute.

SALOME. Don't you say that. You've got plenty of brains—if you'd but use 'em.

JESSE. Salome, would twenty pounds be any use?

SALOME. No, nor yet fifty. Keep your savings.

JESSE. I feel I could do things, if I were once out of this place. 'Tis like a prison to me sometimes. If it wasn't for you here—and father.

SALOME. You can't do wiser than stick to him, and forget me.

JESSE. Mother's so——

SALOME. Yes—I understand. Well—she'll be here and wish us at Jericho in a minute. [*Rising.*] You've said some pretty things to me, Jesse, and I'm sure you meant them; but I'm not the marrying sort. I must be free.

JESSE. [*Gloomily.*] The likes of you don't go free for long.

SALOME. I'm far off what you think. There's a lot of the devil in me, Jesse.

JESSE. You wake the devil in others. You're an angel yourself—all—all angel—to the dinky dimple at the corner of your mouth. [SALOME *smiles, but not at him.*] I'll win you yet! I'll live to do some mighty big thing, and *make* you love me!

[SARAH *and* BARBARA *descend the stairs.*

SALOME. Then set about it. Stop reading books and go into the world. You're all boy still.

[*Exit* JESSE.

BARBARA. 'Tis no use saying them things against the vetinary, Mrs. Tapp. William Arscott lent father good money on the farm at a very ticklish time; and now he wants it again; as we all well knew he would. And why not? Who shall blame him? I don't for one. The man's honest, and we must be the same.

SARAH. A saint of God like your father! Anybody did ought to be proud to lend him money—and forget it.

[*Enter* REDVERS *and* WESTAWAY.

WESTAWAY. 'Tis more, far more than I can ask or expect, Anthony.

REDVERS. Stuff and rubbish. Wouldn't you help me at a pinch, if it had been t'other way round?

WESTAWAY. List, you girls. 'Tis an answer to

prayer. Redvers be going bail for me! He will do it, though I beg him not.

BARBARA. You can't, Mr. Redvers—'tis out of reason.

REDVERS. Right's better than reason, Barbara. You very well know what your father and you girls be to me. Not another word. I'll see Hannaford to-morrow, and Arscott too.

BARBARA. [*To* SARAH.] What'll Mrs. Redvers say?

SARAH. [*Going off with rolling-pin and board, &c.*] Same as your father: that 'tis an answer to prayer.

[*Exit.*

BARBARA. We can't thank you. 'Tis high above thanks.

REDVERS. I'm properly glad to do it.

WESTAWAY. You'll reap your reward in this world, as well as the next, my son. For 'twill *pay* you, Anthony—over and above the kindness and goodness and Christian charity and the blessing of it—beyond all that, there's the *interest*, and you'll be just so much amazed as I was to see the way that jumps up. Pounds and pounds in your pocket in no time!

BARBARA. Come on home, father. Mrs. Redvers will be back before you've done talking.

WESTAWAY. Good-bye; good-bye, my dear man; and God bless you and reward you.

BARBARA. We can only feel it.

SALOME. I'll come after. I want to tell Mr. Redvers about they ponies Tom Bassett takes to market next week.

REDVERS. Good-bye—good-bye. Let your minds be easy. Everything's going all right.

[BARBARA *and* MR. WESTAWAY *go out.*

REDVERS. [*Looks round to see they are alone.*] O lord, I thought I was never going to get a glimpse of my precious girl!

[*Puts his arms round* SALOME.

SALOME. Take care, Tony. Where's Sarah? You darling man to help 'em! But can you—can you do this for father and not hurt your own?

REDVERS. Of course I can, and proud to do it! The money's safe enough in the long run, if I take over the mortgage and the life insurance from Arscott. Leave that.

SALOME. I couldn't speak when I heard, because I knew so well 'twas for me you'd done it.

REDVERS. What better reason? Be all safe for Thursday?

SALOME. Of course it be.

REDVERS. At the broom patch. There's a full moon.

SALOME. I'll be there. Whistle and I'll come to you, Tony. I'll come singing—and love to come—always—always!

REDVERS. My little armful of joy!

[*Takes her in his arms again.*

SALOME. [*Sings 'Widecombe Fair' very softly for his ear alone.*]

"Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me thy grey mare,
All along, down along, out along lee,

For I want for to go to Widecombe Fair,
Wi' Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney."

REDVERS. [*Sings softly.*]
"Peter Davy, Dan'l Whiddon, Harry Hawk!"

SALOME.
"Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all—
Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all!"

REDVERS. I love that song better'n any music on earth! It means you—you dinky, grey-eyed thing!

SALOME. Our fun's over for a bit I reckon. A heavenly time we've had, Tony!

REDVERS. Better'n heaven, Sally. There won't be no Halstock Glen in heaven. There won't be no little holt for you and your old red fox in heaven.

SALOME. [*Kisses him.*] Ban't you tired of me?

REDVERS. When I'm tired of my life—not sooner.

SALOME. Are you glad she's coming home?

REDVERS. Yes, I am. I think the wide world of Ann, and you know it. She's a grand woman—a wonder among women. She did ought to come home happy, for she's nursed her mother into life again after she was given up by the doctor. Please God all will go smooth, as I like it to. We can live our lives but once, and 'tis a sad pity to see a woman so stern and hard with herself as Ann. Terrible high-minded and religious is she.

SALOME. Darkness to your light. . . . If she knew. . . .

REDVERS. I feared once, but I don't now. What

the heart don't guess, the soul don't smart for. She'll never know.

SALOME. Jesse offered marriage to me again by the waterfall just now. 'Tis like hearing a child chirrup about love—after knowing a man's.

REDVERS. I must rattle up Jesse and make him tackle life. He's always mooning over his books. [*Embraces her.*] Well, get going. [*Kisses her.*] Till Thursday. I'll make a snug nest for my li'l dormouse!

[*She goes off and* REDVERS *walks to the door and watches her with happiness in his eyes. He whistles 'Widecombe Fair' gently. He then returns to the kitchen and begins to help in the business of making it tidy.*

[*Enter* SARAH.

REDVERS. Don't you say nothing about that matter of helping Joe Westaway, Sarah.

SARAH. [*Takes tablecloth from drawer in the dresser and begins to prepare for tea on the long table.*] 'Tis no business of ours. You'll tell your wife when you choose. [*Enter* BLOOM.

BLOOM. The trap be in sight up 'pon top of the hill, master!

REDVERS. I'll run out then. Put they bluebells in the midst of the table, Sarah. They'll please her tremendous. [*Exit.*

BLOOM. He's like a play-actor, that man. Be damned if he ain't fooling himself he wants her back!

SARAH. You bitter-weed! Here, take they pots and get 'em out of the way, and fill the kettle.

BLOOM. [*Staring round.*] My stars! The kitchen ain't looked like this since she went out of it.

[*Exit with a pot or two, the kettle and a saucepan from the hearth. Enter* MICHAEL, *he carries some hand luggage.*

MICHAEL. Here she is—here's mother, Sarah. And she's so thin as a herring and pale as a lily. But she's all right! She's all right!

[*Enter* TAPP *with a yellow tin box. There follow him* ANN REDVERS *and* REDVERS.

ANN. [*Coming down and watching* TAPP *take her box upstairs.*] Be careful at the corner, Nat. If that box touches the wall, 'twill leave an ugly mark we're better without. [*Exit* TAPP *upstairs.*] And how are you, Sarah? [*Shakes hands with* MRS. TAPP.] You're looking pretty well and feel so, I hope. All be suent and vitty, I see.

[*Takes in the room swiftly. Her manner is quick, sharp and apprehensive.*

SARAH. We've done our bestest. The house be water-sweet from top to bottom.

REDVERS. Sarah's been up at cock-light this week past, and everyone of us has lent a hand.

MICHAEL. Never was a properer spring-cleaning, mother. [*Exit.*

ANN. We shall see as to that. [*Her eyes are every where.*] 'Tis good to be back. But how much to do Where's Jesse? He did ought——

REDVERS. [*Aside to* ANN.] He's about, but he's down on his luck. There's a reason. I'll whisper it come presently. [*Enter* JESSE.

JESSE. Ah! mother dear! [*Takes off his hat and kisses her*] You look but poorly though, and pale and tired.

ANN. I've only got the headache along of the train. A cup of tea will cure it. Be you all right?

[*Enter* BLOOM *with kettle.*

BLOOM. Good evening, missis. I hope I see you pretty clever.

ANN. Nicely, Joshua, nicely. And your rheumatics?

BLOOM. Worse and worse, ma'am. They do gnaw my bones, like a hungry dog of a night.

[MRS. REDVERS *moves about; her eyes perceive everything. All are solicitous to please her.*

ANN. Take them bluebells off the table and out of that jug, Sarah. That's the one I don't use. 'Tis worth money.

JESSE. Salome Westaway brought the bluebells for you, mother.]

ANN. Very kind of her. The window-sill's the place for them—not the tea-table. [SARAH *moves flowers and puts them into another jug.*] The plants do look a bit thirsty to my eyes.

REDVERS. Don't you trouble about them. They're all right.

ANN. "Don't trouble!" That's your old motto, father. I don't want to hear that. [TAPP *descends the staircase with a piece of rope.*] I'll go and take off my

hat and then tea will be ready. Don't you cook nothing for me; I'm off my food just now.

REDVERS. My life, that won't do! 'Tis time and more'n time you was home again.

ANN. [*Going up staircase.*] More'n time, as you say, father.

[REDVERS *follows her with hand luggage and a parcel or two.*

ANN. [*Turning.*] Leave 'em there. I'll go through 'em presently. Just a little gift or two for all of 'e. I shan't be two minutes.

TAPP. I've took the rope off the box, missis.

ANN. Put it by in the loft. 'Tis new. I want you, Sarah.

[*She goes upstairs.* SARAH *follows her.* TAPP *goes out and Bloom follows him.* REDVERS *turns to exit whistling.*

JESSE. What's upset the apple-cart now? Was it my fault?

REDVERS. She's only tired and full of thoughts what to do first.

JESSE. And what to undo that we've done to please her.

REDVERS. Nay, nay. Her quick eye taketh in so much more than we men know about. 'Tis only the headache; she'll come round presently.

[*Enter* SARAH *from upstairs and* MICHAEL *with a frying-pan and a fish.*

MICHAEL. Where's the fat, Sarah? 'Tis time as I cooked my trout for mother.

SARAH. Missis will be down house in a minute and the water's near boiling. [*Goes off.*

REDVERS. Brew it strong, Sarah; brew it strong.

[*Exit whistling with* JESSE. SARAH *returns with some grease for the fish on a plate and* MICHAEL *puts it upon the fire.*

SARAH. I doubt she'll eat it, Michael.

MICHAEL. Yes, she will—when she hears tell that I've catched it and cooked it for her. Don't forget the water-cresses.

SARAH. There! If I hadn't. [*She goes off.*

MICHAEL. [*Shouting.*] Mother, be you coming? I've got a brave trout frying for 'e.

ANN. [*Upstairs.*] I'm down in a moment, Michael boy.

MICHAEL. [*Shouting.*] 'Tis damn fine to hear your beautiful voice again, mother!

ANN. [*At top of stairs.*] Don't you use them bad words, my dear.

[*Descends the stairs. She has taken off her hat and jacket.*

MICHAEL. Look at this gert fish waiting for you to eat 'un!

ANN. I doubt I can eat it. I be off my food for the minute.

MICHAEL. [*Takes fish off the fire and rises.*] You must eat it, mother. You be wisht. [*Looks at her closely.*] There's something fretting you. Don't tell me there isn't, for I know it.

ANN. Yes, I'm a bit worried.

MICHAEL. Tell me.

ANN. [*Smiling for the first time.*] What a chap for finding out your mother's secrets!

MICHAEL. I'll bet 'tis some of father's secrets more like.

ANN. His secrets be all meant so well that I haven't the heart—but there 'tis—his surprises—buying ponies and one thing and another—they mostly come out wrong side the ledger.

MICHAEL. He's got ponies on the brain still.

ANN. 'Tisn't that—but—well, I'd best think no more about it.

MICHAEL. All's well now you be home again. You'll soon steady father down.

ANN. [*Laughs.*] I'd be a cleverer woman than I am to do that.

MICHAEL. Cleverer than you be! I'd like to see the cleverer woman than you.

ANN. [*Now in good temper.*] You flatterer! You'll be a fine love-maker some day, Michael.

MICHAEL. I shall never see a girl like you to fall in love with, mother.

[ANN *smiles and goes to table.* SARAH *enters with water-cress and plate for fish.* MICHAEL *brings his fish to the table.* SARAH *then goes to door.*

SARAH. [*Calling.*] Tea—tea—tea be ready!

[TAPP *and* BLOOM *enter and take their places at the table.*

TAPP. You do look a thought pinnikin and poor like, missis.

ANN. Along of that stuffy Exeter, Nathaniel. Nobody has their fair share of air in a town, I reckon.

[*Enter* REDVERS *and* JESSE. MICHAEL *takes his place beside his mother, who sits at the top of the table.* SARAH *sits on* MICHAEL'S *left.* JESSE *goes to the left of his mother and* REDVERS *takes the bottom of the table. The tea pot is before* MRS. REDVERS.

SARAH. Shall I pour for 'e, ma'am ?

ANN. No, thank you Sarah. Ax a blessing, father, please.

REDVERS. For what we are about to receive——

Curtain.

ACT II

SCENE: *The rear yard of Harter Farm. The house-door with deep porch opens on the left of the scene, and beside it stands a grindstone upon which are some tools. At the back, dividing the yard from the moor, falls a sharp cleft in the hills surmounted by trees. A gully lies beneath. A low, broken wall separates the yard from this gully, and at one spot, on the right, there is an opening in the wall from which steps descend and drop unseen to the water below. There are two further exits opening on the right of the stage, with the wall of a barn between them, and an exit on the left below the grindstone. There is a litter of straw and red fern about the yard, and a good pile of clean fern beside the barn. Behind the trees, the undulations of the moor roll away to tors on the horizon. There is a wooden bench beside the low wall at the back. A cream pan or two stands near the doorway on a board. The time is evening, and, during the act the light fades gradually from rosy brightness to the cool, pearl-grey twilight of June. The murmur of an unseen waterfall is heard.*

[JESSE *and* ANTHONY REDVERS *discovered.*

JESSE *sits on the bench and looks over the wall to the water beneath; his father sharpens a scythe on the grindstone.*

REDVERS. I can't understand—I can't understand dear mother. She went out last night to see Mrs. Ford, and that late she returned that I was in bed and asleep afore she came home. But to bed she never did come—nor have I seen her to-day, though I rose at dawn and hunted high and low. When I was out of the way she came back, so Sarah tells me, all weary and draggled—as if she'd been pixy-led.

JESSE. [*Looks up at the house.*] She's home now.

REDVERS. I know it—she's in her chamber and the door fast locked against me. Never did the like happen afore.

JESSE. If mother's got anything on her mind, you should hear it, I suppose.

REDVERS. Surely—surely. What be I for but to take the fret of life off her shoulders? Though, Lord knows, you can't always do it, when a person hides her troubles so close.

JESSE. I should have thought a wife would have no troubles away from her husband, nor secrets either.

REDVERS. Nay, nay; we've all got secrets. 'Tis part of human nature to harbour 'em.

JESSE. [*Listlessly.*] I can't keep secrets—must be sharing them. You don't think like mother.

REDVERS. She's a strong thinker, and I'm never too comfortable when she gets thinking. [JESSE *nods.*

[*Enter* BLOOM *with milk pails.*

REDVERS. A faulty, erring man, am I, Jesse; but I do my poor best for them I care about. But this —this antic of locking herself up. She never did that afore.

BLOOM. That baggering heron be down on the river again.

REDVERS. He's better dead. He eats a lot of trout. I'll tell Michael to get his gun.

[*He looks up at the windows and shows uneasiness; but he whistles from force of habit. Then he goes off.*

BLOOM [*Putting down his cans.*] Be there a thunder planet in the air? I'll wager she's heard about the master helping Joe Westaway?

JESSE. He hasn't told her yet.

BLOOM. But somebody else have. She was in the village last night, with the Fords, and she didn't come home till Lord knows when. A helpless pauper like Joe be born to make trouble—sure as the sparks fly upwards. And goes his way rejoicing and says 'tis an answer to prayer! But a cat and a fool always fall on their feet.

JESSE. The prayer to pray is the one you can answer yourself.

BLOOM. That's right. Hard work's the only prayer as gets answered on Dartymoor.

JESSE. 'Tis the fools make all the fret and worry, Joshua.

BLOOM. You be a fool, too—running after a maiden.

JESSE. How about when you were in love?

BLOOM. Never—no more than a caterpillar, I never cared a cuss for females. Nature tickles us humans into breeding afore we've got the sense to keep away from it—that's her craft. But she didn't get over me.

JESSE. You was never a hopeful man.

[*Enter* SARAH *from house.*

BLOOM. Never, and never shall be.

SARAH. Come on Joshua, I'm waiting for that milk.

BLOOM. [*To* JESSE.] But you'll get your turn—don't fear. Us all have the chance to show what we be good for once in our lives.

JESSE. Did you?

BLOOM. Yes, I did. And I was drunk at the time and missed it.

SARAH. You be so impatient, Jesse—impatient with humans and impatient with hosses and impatient with the very growing things in the fields.

JESSE. Patient people always get left behind, Sarah—'tis no virtue. [*Exit.*

SARAH. He can say that! And brought up a Christian! Ban't God in Heaven patient before all things.

BLOOM. God A'mighty patient! I should hope He was. 'Tisn't a very strange thing, surely, for the

father of a large family to be patient with his own cranky childer? If the Lord can't bear with us, who should?

SARAH. His ways ban't our ways. 'Twould be taking the bread out of parson's mouth if we understood the Almighty.

BLOOM. And well parson knows it! Yonder boy is after Salome Westaway, and she won't take him.

[*Picking up buckets.*

SARAH. You didn't lift his hopes, I lay?

BLOOM. No man hears me praise matrimony. I've got to thank it for all my troubles.

SARAH. You? You're a bachelor.

BLOOM. Born in wedlock.

[*Exit. As he goes off,* ANN REDVERS *comes out of house. She is dressed in black and looks haggard and very weary.*

SARAH. Good Lord, missis—what's—?

ANN. Tell Michael I'm down, Sarah.

SARAH. I'll seek him. He's clamouring for you.

[SARAH *goes off.* ANN *sits on the bench and looks before her, staring at the picture in her thoughts.* MICHAEL *hurries in. He carries a gun and leans it against wall.*

MICHAEL. Mother! Thank goodness you be down house again! [*Kisses her.*] Whatever's amiss? I'm terrible troubled for 'e.

ANN. Scorched up—scorched up, body and soul. 'Twas like you to fret. Oh, my God! there ban't none to fret no more for me—none but you.

MICHAEL. Shall I call father?

ANN. Oh, Michael, Michael, he's nothing to us no more. A traitor, Michael—another woman.

MICHAEL. Father with another woman! You're dreaming—you're ill!

ANN. I saw with these eyes. False—false as the first snake—deep as the pit under his eternal laughing and gentleness.

MICHAEL. Be you sure? Be you sure, mother?

ANN. [*Very wearily.*] I've growed so old to-day—'tis so far to look back. And you're my dear son still; and he's your father.

MICHAEL. If I knowed where he was in me, I'd tear him out!

ANN. You mind, on the night I came home, that you thought I looked troubled?

MICHAEL. Aye.

ANN. 'Twas along of meeting Farmer Fortescue in Exeter. Your father wrote that he was going to Crediton market. But he never went. Fortescue had seen him that very afternoon alone in Halstock Woods.

MICHAEL. What troubled you?

ANN. To know he'd spoke false. Still I put it away and hoped he'd forgot. But yesterday evening I was along with the Fords—and Henry Ford began laughing how he'd seen father in Halstock Glen

by night. But why he couldn't guess. Then I set homeward and remembered father was out last night. Presently I stopped on the hill and listed to a nightjar churn out his queer talk. And then I saw Halstock lying dark over the river, and something made me slip down to the water and across the stepping-stones and climb up the Glen. Somehow I knew he was there; and I laughed to myself to think how I'd surprise Anthony if I chanced upon him. So I went under a rowan and waited for moon-rise. She came up behind the cleave all silver-bright, and the darkness was full of light and the silence was full of peace. My last peace in this world, Michael boy! But I thought 'twas good to be there. I said to myself, "You'd be wiser, Ann Redvers, if you comed out like this of a night sometimes, after the bustle of day, and let your soul take rest at the edge of the dark." Then I felt small and mean—to be hid—prying—Ann Redvers prying! My heart rose, and I stood up in the moonlight and turned to go away. [*Pause.*] But all of a moment, afore I could be gone, there fell a noise out of the night. A man whistling 'Widecombe Fair.' It sounded ugly and broke the fine peace. But I knew 'twas Anthony and thought no ill.

MICHAEL. Happy or sad he must be whistling.

ANN. I was going straight to him with my tale of being puzzled and troubled. And then—and then——[*Pause.*] The man was laden. He carried a bundle of fern, and threw it down in a snug place, where the

yellow broom grew high round about. Its flowers were all turned to whiteness by the moonlight. And he spread the fern and made a soft couch of it. Presently he laughed—he laughed; and his laughter touched something deep down in me. 'Twas the laugh that always goes before a drink of cider with him, and the Sunday dinner, and such good things. And I said, "What feast be coming to Anthony Redvers here?" And suddenly I guessed. [*She breaks off and walks up and down.* MICHAEL *stares at her half in fear.*] I came near screaming then—near screaming I came. He sat down and still he whistled 'Widecombe Fair.' And then—far off—scarce louder than a bird, that wakes at night and sings a little note—a woman's voice; and he leapt upon his feet. "My li'l nightingale!" he said. Oh God! I'd fought so hard to save one spark of hope till then. But that killed it. . . . She came—just a shadow out of the light—and I saw the two of them thicken into one, and I heard his kisses on her face. But she spoke nought. So they sank into the dark and I rushed off, careless of the noise I made. They heard nothing. They were glorying and drowning in each other. The Trump of God wouldn't have reached 'em. I wandered till light came. I tramped my feet raw. 'Twas a misty morning and the stars were smothered afore the dawn. I fell in the river once, Michael, and got wetted and bruised and never knew it.

MICHAEL. [*Going to her.*] Mother, mother! You

shan't suffer this. You shall leave father and come away along with me.

ANN. At first I weren't so very angry. Ban't that strange? 'Twas all astonishment. Him—so simple and thankful for small mercies where I was concerned! A man I'd chilled and chastened in his flesh. That he should look elsewhere! To think how he frisked when I come back, same as a dog that welcomes its mistress. 'Twas like a window opening into his soul, Michael—a window that I didn't know was there. And through it I saw him clean emptied of me and full of another woman.

MICHAEL. 'Tis a very wicked, shameful thing for certain.

ANN. Death—death's the least word. The insult the dishonour, the sin! God judge him—God judge him for it!

MICHAEL. Speak, and I'll take you away this very night.

ANN. Nay, my work's to do. He must hear—he must know.

[*Enter* REDVERS. *He exhibits great anxiety.*

REDVERS. At last, mother! For God's sake tell me what's gone wrong. I shall go mad at this gait.

MICHAEL. Mother . . .

REDVERS. [*Impatiently.*] You be off; I don't want you. Get you gone and try and shoot that thieving heron down the river. [MICHAEL *hesitates.*] Begone, I say!

[MICHAEL *looks at his mother, takes up his gun, and then goes out. He indicates acute dislike of his father.*

REDVERS. Curse that boy! He treats me as if I was a bad smell. I'll have a whip-thong about his shoulders yet—old as he is. What's amiss, Ann? For God's love get it off your mind. There's all the woe of the world in your face.

ANN. [*Standing before him and speaking suddenly in a loud voice.*] What were you doing in the broom patch with a woman last night?

[REDVERS *falls back and gasps. He keeps his eyes on her, draws a red handkerchief from his pocket and mops his face.*

ANN. I'd have believed it of any living man before you.

REDVERS. [*Very slowly.*] Once I thought you was bound to find out, and I feared it; and then time passed and I feared no more, and I thought you would never find out. And now you have. And so all's up. Thank God you can keep cool about it. No wife ever forgives that—no woman ever understands. What's your will, Anne?

[*Sits down quietly on form by the wall.*

ANN. Have I been a good partner to you?

REDVERS. My pride and glory for three and twenty years—my first thought and prayer.

ANN. Liar! Cruel liar to talk that trash. False while you kissed me—false while you—

REDVERS. [*Rising.*] No, Ann—never. I call God to strike me dead where I stand if I tell anything but truth. I've been so true to you as I have been to myself.

ANN. True to yourself; false to all others belike.

REDVERS. Never. You've had my love and worship always.

ANN. I saw you make her bed.

REDVERS. Is it false to one woman to be fond of another? Has no man ever loved two women true and tender? 'Tis a thing in their power, I tell you—a thing that scores have done. I love you with all my heart and soul. I'd die for you, and die laughing. Can you call home an impatient word, or harsh speech, or unkind deed from me in all your life? I've loved you rising and sleeping—year in, year out—and you know it, Ann—you know it in your heart. And t'other be a dear thought to me also. I wouldn't deny it if I could. I know 'tis death to you to hear me say that; but it shall be said.

[*He sits down again.*

ANN. She's younger than me?

REDVERS. Leave her out. There's no stain on her. The fault be mine—mine through and through. All went well enough, because none was hurt by it. But now that you be hurt so cruel, 'tis different. You won't understand. An angel from heaven wouldn't understand. 'Twould take a devil from hell to do

that—according to what you believe. The way of a man's body— [*Pause.* REDVERS *rises, and beats his breast.*] This here dust be nought—'twill go down to the pit ere long, and be forgot. But, afore God, my conscience is clear of evil.

ANN. Conscience! To come to me from cuddling her!

REDVERS. Try and grasp hold of my meaning afore tis too late, Ann. I'm built so. My flesh and blood's a bit too much for you and always was. And a bit too much for me sometimes. Try and understand that a man like me be turned on a different lathe from a woman like you. He's hungrier—thirstier—beastlier—yet I won't grant that neither, for I've never been that. [*She looks at him with passionate dislike, moves from him and goes down by the grindstone.*] Well, life's done. I won't ax you to be generous—that would be mean; and yet, if I don't ax it, you'll think that I don't want you to be. But if it had happened t'other way round——

ANN. [*Turns in wrath. She has taken a heavy knife off the grindstone where it lies with others.*] You dare! To think that—to harbour such a thought in your filthy mind against me!

REDVERS. No, no, no! I thought no such thing. There's no common clay at all in you Who should know that like I know it?

ANN. [*Dropping the knife.*] If I'd been a bad wife——

REDVERS. The best ever a man had. I've blown

a trumpet about my luck ever since we wedded! 'Twas only the fret and trouble, and the children, and trifles like that ever came between us. But I was a weak fool to let such things hurt.

ANN. Ann Redvers to marry a weak fool! What was it to find that out? [*Staring at him.*] But I loved you. I was true as steel and I hid my feelings deep. You'd never have known them to your dying hour—but for this.

REDVERS. [*Strokes his beard and gives a little laugh.*] Did you think I didn't know? Nay, nay—'twasn't hid from me, Ann. I knew what you thought of me well enough. Your eyes told me. Often—often I've seen you despise me with 'em. . . . And now the past be past and done. I'm sorry—bitterly sorry about it—so all's said.

ANN. Why for are you sorry—you that pretend you did no sin?

REDVERS. Sorry 'tis found out. That's all. It went very well and offered a little joy for two harmless people.

ANN. Harmless! You've killed your soul—that's what you've done—and her's—and her's! Who have shared this masterpiece of wickedness with you?

REDVERS. Thank God you don't know—and please God you never shall. That's so much to the good anyway.

[*He sits down again. He reveals great grief upon his countenance. He leans forward and puts his hands between his knees.*

ANN. After two and twenty years. . . .

[*Her face indicates that she is thinking of old times. Emotions cross it. Grief fades to indifference, which anger banishes. Her expression grows inert, and then quickens into a momentary happiness. Looking into the bygone years, she smiles. For a moment she forgets. Then her face grows tender and yearning. He sees nothing; his eyes are on the ground. He whistles a few notes, then is silent. He turns to the wall presently and buries his face upon his arm. She takes a step or two towards him, then hesitates. She weeps and puts her hands over her face and goes into the house.*

REDVERS. [*Ignorant that she has gone.*] Don't tell the boys just yet, Ann. I'll do any mortal thing in reason. A hugeous upheaval. You say 'tis death—'tis worse than death. Death makes an end. But this—— [*Turns round and finds that his wife has gone. The sunset fires have faded and the light is dying. He walks to the door; then stands still. He picks up the knife that Anne dropped and puts it back on the grindstone. Then he goes to look over the broken wall at rear of yard. He stands where it is lowest and sets one foot upon it. He thrusts his hands into his breeches pockets. There is heard the sound of the waterfall.*] Poor Ann—poor Salome! [*He whistles mechanically. His face is unutterably mournful. He*

looks down into the gully and then up at the hills. For a few moments he ceases to whistle.] If I could bear it all.

[*He takes a step or two and then returns to the wall and the former position. Now he whistles 'Widecombe Fair' slowly. Enter* ANN REDVERS *from the door behind him. She weeps no more. Her face is bright with the spirit of forgiveness.*

ANN. Husband—I be going to pardon——

[*She breaks off and listens to the tune that he is whistling. It silences her and instantly changes her mood.* ANN'S *expression alters into one of fury. She glares at* REDVERS, *and loses her self-control. She flies at him, and strikes him with both hands together at the back of his neck.* MICHAEL *and* JESSE *appear down left.* MICHAEL *carries his gun.*

ANN. [*Screaming.*] Lewd, pitiless wretch!

REDVERS. [*Putting up both hands.*] Ann!

[*He topples forward and disappears. There is a moment's silence, then his body is heard to strike the rocks beneath.*

JESSE. You've killed him mother!

[*He hurries across to the steps in the wall and descends them.*

MICHAEL. [*Dropping his gun and hastening to* ANN. Oh mother, you've done for him!

ANN. Help Jesse—quick—quick!

MICHAEL. I'll stick up for you for ever.

ANN. Go!

[MICHAEL *descends the steps after* JESSE.

JESSE. [*Below.*] I do think he lives.

ANN. Please God—Please God! [*She goes to the top of the steps.*] Gently. Hold up his head, Jesse!

[*She descends a few steps to help them.* JESSE *and* MICHAEL *carry up their father.*

JESSE. Lie him down here—heap the fern for his head.

[*They lower him gently on fern that litters the yard, near the wall of the barn.*

ANN. Fetch the brandy, Michael.

[ANN REDVERS *kneels beside him and opens his collar and shirt. While she is thus engaged,* JESSE *starts running across to right exit.* MICHAEL, *who is now near door into house, leaps to his gun and picks it up.*

MICHAEL. Stop! Come you back Jesse Redvers, or, by Christ, I'll shoot you!

JESSE. [*Turns and walks back. Both young men are trembling with rage.*] Shoot then—shoot me in the back—like she killed my father. I was going for doctor. But shoot, and be a murderer too. I don't want to live if he's gone.

[*He goes off.* ANN *pays no heed to either of them. She knows now that her husband is dead.*

MICHAEL. [*Calls off to* JESSE.] Bring back any other but doctor, and I'll swing for you!

[*Drops gun and turns to his mother.* ANN

places the head of ANTHONY REDVERS *back gently and buttons up his shirt. She takes the red handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his face. Then she rises and moves away, but does not lift her eyes from him.*

ANN. He's dead.

MICHAEL. 'Twas justice—and God knows it—and them that wouldn't understand never shall know it.

[*She still gazes at* REDVERS. MICHAEL *creeps up to her and holds her hand. There remains the murmur of the waterfall.*

Curtain.

ACT III

SCENE: *The Parlour, Watchett Hill Farm. A poor room with a blurred looking-glass over the chimney-piece, and wedding and funeral cards stuck down the sides of it. The gilded frame is tarnished in many places. A suite of faded and withered green rep occupies the room, and some of the chairs, with broken legs, stand propped against the wall. The table carries a vase of dried grass, a family Bible, a worsted mat or two and a few books. There is also a small, light table, with ledgers and pen and ink upon it. Oleographs, hung very high, and mostly crooked, occupy the walls. The lace window-curtains are torn. The blind is white and ragged. Under the window stands the couch of the suite. The carpet is very threadbare, and there are stains of past leaks on the faded, outer wall of the room. Fir-cones are piled to fill the empty fireplace. A few withered photographs in frames stand upon the chimney-piece, and, before the hearth, lies a mat, made of the skins of sheep-dogs. There is a harmonium in one corner of the room. Doors to the right and the left.*

[BARBARA *and* SALOME *discovered. They are*

moving the things off the table and piling them on the floor. They also thrust back the arm-chairs and clear the room as much as may be. BARBARA *is unchanged.* SALOME *is paler, thinner and perceptibly older. She speaks more slowly and with a heavy indifference. The lustre of happiness has departed from her. Both women are clad in print dresses, wear aprons, and have their sleeves turned over their elbows.*

SALOME. When do they come to sell us up?

BARBARA. Half past four o'clock 'tis to be. I doubt there's room for 'em all in here.

SALOME. I can't see us away from Watchett Hill, Barbara.

BARBARA. Can't you? You soon will—unless—[*She is at the mantelpiece putting something upon it from the table. A card in the looking-glass falls and attracts her attention.*] My! Strange 'twas that one! Poor Anthony Redvers—his funeral card. It must be a year as near as can be.

SALOME. 'Tis a year to-day.

BARBARA. Little that dead man thought his money would only put off the trouble for a twelvemonth. [*Putting back card.*] Poor Anthony—he done his best. He gave us a year more. But now 'tis the hoss doctor, and devil take the hindmost.

SALOME. Arscott was patient enough with all his faults.

BARBARA. So's a lot of other things. For why? They can afford to be. Well might the man bide patient. His patience be growing gold for him—same as the

patience of the earth grows corn. But I don't quarrel with Billy and never have.

SALOME. [*Listlessly.*] I suppose it will be a cottage for father, and us in service?

BARBARA. No, it won't. I ain't going to leave father—not for service anyway. Something have got to be managed. Since we can't do it single, we must see if we can do it double.

SALOME. What d'you mean?

BARBARA. I mean marriage.

SALOME. Takes two for that.

BARBARA. Well, and the man's waiting in your case. Jessie Redvers be wearing his heart out for 'e.

SALOME. 'Husband'! A queer word.

BARBARA. [*Grows very self-conscious and looks cautiously round her.*] Not half so queer as the thing by all accounts. But I've got my ideas. I don't preach to you what I'm afraid to practise. I mean Billy Arscott. 'Tis now or never.

SALOME. You shan't do it! You shan't do it, Barbara. A market bargain! Never would father have a moment's peace.

BARBARA. Oh yes, he would! There'd be peace, and plenty too. The man would straighten us out in no time. Safe as a rock for a husband.

SALOME. And as hard.

BARBARA. But I ain't the fine thing I was ten years ago, and nobody knows that better than I do. I feel very friendly to him, however, though 'tis bitter likely he's got no more use for me. Don't whisper it to father

[*Enter* JOSEPH WESTAWAY *and* JOSHUA BLOOM.

WEST. Eight or ten of 'em be coming. Toby Hannaford and a good few others. And Billy Arscott will drop in an hour earlier. [*He looks at his watch.*] He's going through the books once more, with Barbara, so as to save time at the meeting.

BLOOM. Sharpening his claws—the wretch!

BARBARA. [*To* BLOOM.] Why do you poke in? We don't owe you nothing anyway, Joshua Bloom.

WEST. Joshua's an inquiring sort of man and wants to add to his knowledge. He's never seen a meeting of creditors afore and may never get the chance again, so I've let him come.

BLOOM. I be here in a most neighbourly spirit, miss, and got a whole holiday for it and all! I can't do nought, but I can shed the light of my countenance.

BARBARA. If that would fright 'em away, I'd say nothing.

WEST. 'Tis a trying thing for a man in my position to be pressed for cash. You'd never guess it, Bloom, but I've signed a cheque for forty-nine pounds, eighteen shillings in my time! Yes—and made no stir about it. But bankrupt's not the word. No man can be made a bankrupt with my faith in God, and my knowledge of sheep, and two such good daughters as these here women.

BLOOM. And when all's said, us shall soon all be in our graves and at peace.

WEST. True again! This life's no more than the sour rind to a sweet nut, Joshua. Not so sour,

neither. Your poor master, Anthony Redvers, knowed that well enough. If he'd been spared——

BLOOM. 'Tis this day year he dropped. The missis and Michael have took the wreath to the grave and Mister Jesse's going to call here come presently. The wreath be a terrible brave trophy—so bright as the sun and all in a glass case. 'Twill make his mound the pride o' the churchyard.

BARBARA. 'Tis a black day for her.

BLOOM. Black for all of us. But life's three parts black days, and the rest be grey. And no doubt you feel terrible down-daunted with this rally of creditors hanging over you.

WEST. 'Tis but a small thing against that widow's grief.

BLOOM. The dead be out of it. The grave be a very cheerful state in my judgment—but for the getting there. I can see Redvers now—lying on the fern in the yard—for all the world as if he slept. And then come the inquest, and blame thrown on that dangerous place in the wall, and the sympathy with the widow and her sons.

WEST. Well might the folk be sorry.

BARBARA. Nothing but good could any say of that man and none will ever forget his funeral. The most unexpected folk cried like childer.

WEST. 'Twas a thing to remember without a doubt. Come, Joshua Bloom. I must be going to the village; but you'll be back in lots 'o time for the fun. Us'll look at my grass on the way. 'Tis a wonderful crop.

BLOOM. Grass be nothing without beasts to eat it.

WEST. A very true saying. Beasts and grass be the halves of a flail—one nought without t'other. But land's the solemn thought—the land under a man's feet.

BLOOM. And never more solemn than when you be going to lose it, flock-master.

[*Exeunt* WESTAWAY and BLOOM. WESTAWAY *looks in at door again immediately.*

WEST. Here's Jesse Redvers come. [*Exit.*

BARBARA. We don't want him yet.

SALOME. His mother kissed me last time I fell in with her. [*Goes to door.*

BARBARA. [*Busy at left of room.*] Who'd have thought the likes of her would miss a man so much?

SALOME. She loved him. Love takes many patterns.

[SALOME *opens the door for* JESSE.

BARBARA. I wish I knowed what pattern Billy Arscott's be like to take.

[JESSE *enters. He is clad in work-a-day clothes with a black band on his arm. He wears his father's big silver watch-chain.*

BARBARA. You be a lot too soon, Jesse.

JESSE. I can't keep away to-day. You know that.

[SALOME and JESSE *stand at the doorway.* BARBARA *pays no heed to them.*

SALOME. Bloom says the new wreath be a fine sight.

JESSE. There's fairer things on his grave already. A great bunch of white windflowers lies there. Others loved him beside us.

SALOME. Flowers be all you can give the dead.

JESSE. 'Tis strange to see the grass so green. It seems only yesterday his pit was dug for him.

SALOME. But the sorrow's old—like thicky band I stiched upon your sleeve.

JESSE. Nay—that's worn rusty. The torture of my memory is fresh enough. [BARBARA *goes to the window.*] They talk of hell, hell's here on earth or nowhere.

[ARSCOTT *passes window.*

SALOME. Aye; 'tis the living get hell, not the dead.

BARBARA. Here he is! [ARSCOTT *raps at the door.* BARBARA *takes off her apron and turns down her sleeves.*] Here's Billy Arscott.

[*She opens the door and lets in* WILLIAM ARSCOTT.

JESSE. With a flower in his buttonhole, as though 'twas a revel!

ARSCOTT. If I'm in the way, say so; but half after three was my hour. [*To* JESSE.] You and me must knock our heads together for these maidens when the meeting is over. Have 'e got the books, Barbara? There's a dozen men and women coming, and they'll all be so punctual as winter.

SALOME. You don't want me?

BARBARA. [*Nervously.*] I may do. You bide in the kitchen, please, Salome; and Jesse can go about his business and come back later.

JESSE. [*To* ARSCOTT.] 'Tis understand we meet after.

[*Exit* JESSE. SALOME *casts a searching look at* BARBARA, *and then at* ARSCOTT. *She goes off.*

BARBARA. [*Fetching books from table.*] At Quarter Day Watchett Hill's yours, William—to the last daisy in the meadow—and we must go forth—father and sister and me.

ARSCOTT. [*Sitting down at the table and taking out his spectacle case.*] Naked we come into the world and naked we leave it. Nobody's more sorry for Joe than I am.

BARBARA. [*Putting the books in front of him.*] 'Tis the land he loves so dear. I do pray just the leastest scrap o' land can be spared for him. Surely a man that's owned five and twenty acres—you wouldn't put him in a house in a row, with nought but a back fence and a back garden and a rope to dry the washing on?

ARSCOTT. I want to keep him out of the house that's got a hundred windows and no garden at all—the Union Workhouse.

BARBARA. He's helped to save many another from it.

ARSCOTT. Why, my dear woman, you wasn't used to pipe that silly stuff! Have time broke your pluck?

BARBARA. We can't all wear like William Arscott. The years pass you by and never leave a mark.

[*Goes to glass and smooths her hair.*

ARSCOTT. That's true. I don't feel my age.

BARBARA. And don't look it.

[*She gets some account books from the side table and brings pen and ink. He sits by the big table and puts on his spectacles.*

ARSCOTT. And my hair's so thick as thatch yet; and

when I was at the tooth-drawer's to Okehampton, the man said as he'd never seen a better lot of grinders.

BARBARA. All very good signs.

ARSCOTT. There's a sight more sap in me than anybody guesses, Barbara.

BARBARA. A good husband flung away in my opinion.

ARSCOTT. And who flung him away?

BARBARA. I'm speaking about you—not me.

[ARSCOTT *rises and goes to the window.* BARBARA *stands by the fireplace, then she kneels, picks up a fallen fir-cone and upsets others. She is nervous.*

BARBARA. You ain't against marriage as a general thing, however?

ARSCOTT. Good lord, no! The world must go on. Didn't I ax you to marry me?

[*They go back to the books.*

BARBARA. [*Sitting down.*] We—we all make mistakes.

[*Shows deep anxiety to see how he will take this admission.*

ARSCOTT. [*Misunderstanding.*] Well, well—but some might think 'twas you that did—not me.

BARBARA. [*Setting her teeth, frowning and then speaking.*] I might think so myself.

[*A long silence. He turns away from the books. Then he stands up and looks at her. She turns and sits at the table with her back to him. He regards her very closely and*

she is conscious of it and begins to suffer. She puts her hands up to her neck.

BARBARA. Speak for God's sake! Don't creep about like that behind me. I can eel your eyes in my back.

ARSCOTT. [*Putting his spectacles into their case and then into his pocket.*] Take a easy chair and keep cool. 'Tis for me to grow warm—not you. Do 'e see all that hangs to this?

[*He draws out an easy chair. She does not move, so he sits in the easy chair himself, crosses his legs, picks his teeth and smiles.*

ARSCOTT. Ban't leap year neither, Barbara!

[*Laughs.*

BARBARA. I've said it—though it cost more than any male could ever know, or dream. I've said it, and I mean it.

ARSCOTT. You're sorry for that 'no' ten year agone? [BARBARA *nods her head.*] Well, well! What a day may bring forth! and me just beginning to think serious of Widow Powesland—at the 'Red Lion,' over to Tavistock!

BARBARA. I didn't know that, William.

ARSCOTT. Of course you didn't—more do she.

BARBARA. We'd better do the books.

ARSCOTT. Plenty o' time. 'Tis a very startling thing for a woman to propose marriage to a man. It don't often happen and I'm a bit flustered accordingly. 'Tis a great compliment—if you be thinking of me and not your father.

BARBARA. You've a right to put it so, and I knew you would. Of course it ain't poetry, like it was ten years ago.

ARSCOTT. Don't say that neither. I'm sure 'tis very poetical for a woman to pop the question.

BARBARA. I've long larned to make sixpence do the work of a shilling, William, if that's anything.

ARSCOTT. The craft of you women! 'Anything'? Dammy! It's everything! How many females know the power in a penny? But there's fors and againsts. A man mustn't forget his duty to himself.

BARBARA. You're not likely to do that.

ARSCOTT. Ten years is ten years; and ten years hits a woman harder than a man. You mustn't expect them tearing fine speeches of ten years ago, Barbara.

BARBARA. No—I don't. The gilt's off the gingerbread—I know that. I shan't think the worse of you if you feel the hour be gone past.

[ARSCOTT *gets up and saunters about the room.*

ARSCOTT. As a rule, your ugly, time-stained people are wiser than the handsome ones. Cast your eyes over me; I've got ten wrinkles to your father's one. And as for you—a woman's face and figure be delicate subjects; but truth is truth, and this is the time for it, and the truth is that you— [*Shakes his head.*] Thinner round the bosom, to be plain, and paler in the cheek, and not quite the old crown of honey-coloured hair that I used to doat on.

BARBARA. [*Shivers and lifts her hands to her breast*

as though to hide it.] I've been hungry more than once since then.

ARSCOTT. And so have I—for you, Barbara! Thin—yes, but you're worth your corn to any man. Tough and not frightened of work, and good-looking and good-tempered, and better'n a barrel-load of young, giglet girls, that don't know they're born. [*Extends his arms as if he wanted her to come into them.*] So, cut it short, and come—I'll take you—and proud to!

BARBARA. [*Bows her head.*] You know how we are placed, William. Father's got none to trust to but——

ARSCOTT. Be loverly! Be loverly! Don't drag him in.

BARBARA. I wouldn't mix business with pleasure, William—don't think that.

ARSCOTT. More wouldn't I. And 'tis a real, proper pleasure, all of a sudden, like this, to think of marrying you.

BARBARA. [*Humbly.*] Thank you kindly, William.

ARSCOTT. I'm hard, but I'm sporting. I'll do my part, and do it well. But don't rub in your father just now. Give me a kiss, Barbara! Be blessed if there isn't a bit of poetry to it—even after all these years!

BARBARA. I know you're sporting.

[*Lets him kiss her.*

ARSCOTT. Mind and keep dumb for a bit. Let the chaps all come with their long faces and I'll burst it among 'em presently. Think of Toby Hannaford's

mug! And your father's! So good as a circus I promise you.

BARBARA. Oh, William, be a real lover and grant one favour—only one. I'll never ask another.

ARSCOTT. Ha—ha—you're begging early! Come here—let me stroke your fine arms. Sit on my lap—just half a second! Why not? A bowerly maiden you be—and—and—— [*Takes her in his arms.*

BARBARA. Swear to God, you'll never tell no living creature 'twas I that axed you.

ARSCOTT. Ashamed of your forward ways a'ready! No, be sure I won't squeak about that. They'll all say I'm a scoundrel and drove a sinful hard bargain—but let 'em! I don't care—so long as I've got you.

BARBARA. [*Very gratefully.*] Thank you, William [*Leaves him and prepares to go*] And, William——

[*Returns impulsively, kisses him warmly, and hurries off.*

ARSCOTT. [*Licking his lips.*] If I'd only guessed, I'd have made old Joe gallop before this!

[*Enter* JOSEPH WESTAWAY. *He carries a black bottle and a parcel in a paper bag.*

ARSCOTT. You're a lucky old fool, flock-master—and don't deserve a pennyworth of it! What have you got in thicky bottle—poison?

WEST. I've bought a cake and wine, William. Cake and wine for the creditors.

[*Takes a big cake out of bag. Enter* BARBARA.

ARSCOTT. You be dying game, my old bird!

BARBARA. God's goodness, father! This ban't a party.

WEST. It is and it ain't. Where the males assemble together, save in church or at hounds, there's got to be eating and drinking. For a wedding or a funeral, solids; for a christening or a meeting of creditors, just a drop of sherry wine and a nibble of plum cake—to make the people patient. So get a corkscrew and some glasses and no more about it.

ARSCOTT. You do what you're told, Barbara, and be sharp.

[*Exit* BARBARA. *Men's voices heard off and men pass the window.*

WEST. Here they come.

ARSCOTT. Two and two and all in black—like carrion crows to a dead oss!

[*Enter* BLOOM.

BLOOM. The creditors be on 'e, Joe! A proper rally of 'em!

[*Enter* SALOME, *who wears a sun bonnet, followed by* BARBARA. *The latter carries glasses and a corkscrew on a tray.* WESTAWAY *puts corkscrew into bottle.*

ARSCOTT. Why be you like that cork, Joe?

[*Enter* JESSE REDVERS, TOBY HANNAFORD, NED PEARN *and others, including two elderly women*

HANNAFORD. We be come, neighbour—and cruel sorry to come.

PEARN. I wish there was any way out, Joe; but the age of miracles be gone, I'm fearing.

WEST. Don't you say that, Ned. The Almighty's all powerful still. He could get me out of this fix with a turn of His Holy Wrist if He willed it so. [*Enter two more men.*] Come in—come in You're all welcome.

ARSCOTT. This ain't fair to the drawing-room carpet. Let's go in the yard! Fetch along the books, Barbara, and lend me a hand.

WEST. A good thought. Hand the chairs out of the window, Salome; there's some in the kitchen too. But you folk must have a wet afore we begin.

HANNAFORD. Nay, nay—we ban't here to drink wine.

BLOOM. To suck blood more like—eh Toby?

ARSCOTT. Come you all into the yard and hear the figures first; and then I'll ax you to list to me.

[EXEUNT ARSCOTT, HANNAFORD, PEARN *and others.* BLOOM *helps* BARBARA *to hand some chairs through the window.* JESSE *and* SALOME *go off.*

BLOOM. 'Tis for all the world as if the brokers were in a'ready!

WEST. [*To* ARSCOTT *outside the window.*] Put 'em on the lew side o' the big linhey, William. Lend a hand with the table, Barbara.

[BARBARA *and* WESTAWAY *go out carrying the small table between them.*

BLOOM. No doubt this will come after. [*Smells the bottle.*] Pretty drinking by the smell of it.

[*Enter* JESSE *and* SALOME. *He carries two kitchen chairs and she carries one.* BLOOM *and another take* JESSE'S *two chairs and go out with the remaining men.* JESSE *hands* SALOME'S *chair through the window.*

JESSE. You don't mean to be there?

SALOME. Why should I watch 'em fight for our bones?

JESSE. Arscott don't want me yet. My mother's wishful to help—if she can—and——

SALOME. [*Flings her sunbonnet on to the sofa.*] She's done enough already.

JESSE. She only kept my father's promise.

SALOME. I warrant she's down-daunted to-day.

JESSE. Her sorrow has opened my eyes to the sorrow of all the world. And to yours—yours too Salome.

SALOME. [*Starting slightly.*] What do you mean?

JESSE. You hide yourself from everybody but me; but love makes me see the truth of you.

SALOME. Love's blind.

JESSE. You're sad and sorry and the world bears hard on you. You *feel* the grief of it—same as I do.

SALOME. Yes, but I'd shame to share my griefs.

[*She sits on table near him.*

JESSE. My heart's always crying to share. A shared grief's the lighter, Salome.

SALOME. Then you'd share for selfishness.

JESSE. [*Starts.*] What a thought!

SALOME. Work, I tell you. Work your fingers to the bone. Work till your flesh aches and makes you forget your aching heart. Copy your mother. Grief have made her sweet, like the frost ripes the sloe. That kindly she's grown with young and old—as gentle as she used to be stern. She kissed me when last I saw her.

JESSE. She's very fond of you.

SALOME. If you could look in my heart, young Jesse, you'd find that I know more of her loss than any other creature.

JESSE. [*He nods.*] I've heard you say truer things about my father than anybody. If I was more like him, perhaps then——?

SALOME. [*Shakes her head.*] You and me be the sort to die together—not live together. I've loved and I've lost. [*Half to herself.*] He called himself my red fox; but he wasn't a red man really.

JESSE. [*Astonished.*] What are you saying?

SALOME. He's gone—like last year's sunshine.

JESSE. I never heard you name a sweetheart, Salome.

SALOME. You make folk blab things—like you do yourself. Why should I tell you? Water to his wine you are—tears to his laughter; but I love you, too, you poor, sad Jesse. You be fit company for mourners.

JESSE. My heart's very full to-day—full and empty both. [*Pause.*] Father thought the world of you. His eye would light when your name was named.

SALOME. [*She looks at him watchfully and shows no emotion.*] You ought to be with your mother—not with me.

JESSE. Michael is with her.

SALOME. A tower of strength that man.

JESSE. But he's no more use to my sad mother than I am.

SALOME. He believes like she does.

JESSE. If I could show her truth! I've fought to do it, Salome—for her peace. From many books and much thinking I've got to doubt; and from seeing the ache of the world; and from watching the good and patient go down to dust and sorrow. To reach her heart with the truth! I've often thought she might take it from you.

SALOME. No angel from heaven would shake her trust in God.

JESSE. But a woman from earth might shake her trust in hell. I've talked till I'm weary, but 'tis all vain.

SALOME. What have you told her?

JESSE. That 'tisn't conscience but remorse that's eating her alive. Remorse—a hateful, foul poison that kills life and hope. If she could but take up her life for the sake of the living—instead of hungering to die for the sake of the dead. She makes the wages of sin life, not death.

SALOME. Sin?

JESSE. 'Tis her word, not mine. Sin's only a parson's scarecrow to fright us human children. You can be guilty and sinless, Salome. And sinless she is. "We are free, we are free agents," she says—like a bell tolling; but 'tis tolling a lie. There's no free will—none. D'you understand that?

SALOME. Then this God, they tell about, hasn't the right to judge any man?

JESSE. There 'tis! Make her see that—make her feel that! No free will, no judgment. [*Loud laughter outside.*] Mother says her immortal soul is lost. I say, granted she's got a soul, it isn't lost.

SALOME. Every man's free to go uphill or down—to eat or starve.

JESSE. Not one! And if no choice—then no sin

SALOME. You poor word-spinner!

JESSE. Suppose you'd done a thing in the past, SALOME, and couldn't be sure whether 'twas good or evil?

SALOME. [*Weary of the theme.*] Your heart tells you if 'tis evil or not.

JESSE. But they lie and say the heart of man is desperately wicked, so we daren't listen to our hearts. 'Tis conscience we heed: the things our mothers taught us. The Ten Commandments—why the rocks they were writ on are more a part of God's word than them! I've thought 'em to nothing—every one of 'em.

SALOME. You'll think yourself into a madhouse some

day. You can leave God out; but you can't leave man out. You can't get away from justice. Stealing means prison, and murder means hanging.

JESSE. [*Deeply interested.*] But it wasn't murder—that's what I've fought to show her ever since my father died. She struck him in a moment of wrath.

[*Pause.*

SALOME. Struck him—she—she——?

JESSE. Salome!

[*Looks at her and puts his hand to his forehead.*

SALOME. 'Twasn't accident?

JESSE. I forgot—my heart was bursting with it today.

SALOME. She struck him?

JESSE. Like the flash of the lightning. He fell and the rocks in the river-bed killed him.

[SALOME *succumbs and sits down abruptly on the sofa behind her. She stares at* JESSE. *Shouts of laughter rise without.* ARSCOTT'S *voice heard.* SALOME *recovers self-control and assumes a tense, watchful manner, like a hunting cat.*

SALOME. Ann Redvers. There's only one thing that woman would have done—murder for.

JESSE. Not murder—not murder. Never say it or think it. There was a wretch got hold of him—some nameless harlot. And mother found out—and——

SALOME *put her face down against the back of the sofa and hides her eyes with her hands.*] She'll be thank-

ful to God you know. She'll say 'twas her God made it slip out and loosed my tongue. She's always on her knees praying to be punished. When it happened, we made her promise not to give herself up—Michael swore he'd kill himself if she did. But now—you, Salome. It must come to good. It must, Salome—— [SALOME *stares fixedly, but does not display her emotion.*] Speak to me.

SALOME. I'm looking at Ann Redvers.

JESSE. By his grave now. The unhappiest woman in the world. Think what 'twould be to comfort that broken heart.

SALOME. Comfort!

[BLOOM *comes in.*

BLOOM. You be wanted, Mister Jesse. There's signs and wonders happening in the land, I warn 'e! Laugh! Why, the folk have shook Dartymoor!

[*Exit* BLOOM.

JESSE. If anything was ever sacred, 'tis what you've heard this day, Salome.

[*He looks back to see her still staring, but self-controlled. Then he follows* BLOOM.

SALOME. Anthony!

[*She sinks into a posture of grief. Anon she steadies herself and reflects. Presently she indicates anger and a desire to be moving. She leaps up and looks about her. Then she puts on her sunbonnet. Without, there are laughter and voices, that grow louder as men and women pass the window.*

SALOME *is just about to go to the door but she sees that the people are there. She hastens off as the other door opens. There enter* WILLIAM ARSCOTT, JOSEPH WESTAWAY, JESSE REDVERS, *and* BARBARA *with the other women.* TOBY HANNAFORD, NED PEARN, BLOOM, *and the rest follow, or remain at the window looking in.*

WEST. What did I tell my unbelieving girls? That an old man's faith can move mountains still!

[*Pours out the wine and puts a glass into the hands outstretched towards him.*

BARBARA. Sally must know!

[*Runs across and exit.*

BARBARA [*Off.*] Salome!

HANNAFORD. Good luck and long live to 'em!

THE OTHER MEN AND WOMEN. Good luck! Long life!

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE: *Harter kitchen as before. A year has passed and there are certain inevitable alterations in the arrangement of the furniture and minor details of the room. Different hams and herbs suspend from the ceiling. The grocer's almanac has disappeared, and there are no plants in the recesses of the windows. A shawl hangs over the back of the settle by the fireplace. The time is night. Dark blinds are drawn. A candle burns on the mantelpiece, and a tall paraffin lamp with a white glass shade stands upon the table. Under the lamp is the work-box of Ann Redvers, open, with a litter of white work about it.*

[ANN REDVERS *discovered, with* SARAH TAPP, NATHANIEL TAPP, *and* MICHAEL. ANN *is working;* SARAH *knits beside the fire, and* NATHANIEL *is near her.* MICHAEL *smokes, sitting near his mother.*

TAPP. No, ma'am, you don't judge the evil-doer so stern as you did use to do. But the times call for it.

There's a lot of wickedness about, and 'tis no good looking t'other way.

ANN. Let each begin at home, Nathaniel.

TAPP. So I say, and so I do. 'Tis a very good thing to sweep the Gospel broom round the dark corners of the heart.

SARAH. There be many that shake at the thought of not having a spring cleaning; yet they never think about a soul cleaning from one year's end to another. [*Rises and gathers her knitting.*

MICHAEL. You ought to join the Methodies, Sarah.

SARAH. I call a spade a spade, and a sinner a sinner.

ANN. We must do good for evil, Sarah—and think good for evil.

SARAH. I never could do good for evil myself, and I won't pretend it.

TAPP. More don't the Law of the land. Justice for evil be the Law.

MICHAEL. What is justice?

TAPP. 'Tis the best that man can do. Mercy be better left to God.

ANN. Maybe His mercy is the highest justice.

MICHAEL. There; you're answered, Nat. God's all love, or else He's nought.

TAPP. That ain't my idea, Mister Michael, nor yet Jehovah's—not if I know him.

SARAH. [*Lights candle at little table beside the 'Grandfather' clock. To* TAPP.] Come, master, tis

bedtime for you and me. Good-night, missis; good-night, Michael.

MICHAEL. Good-night, good-night. Pray for charity, Nat. [*Exeunt* NATHANIEL *and* SARAH TAPP.

ANN. Ban't Jesse home yet?

MICHAEL. Lord knows—I don't.

ANN. I'm wishful to hear how it went at Westaway's.

MICHAEL. Be bright, be bright, for God's sake, mother! Put your work by and talk.

ANN. [*Puts down her work and leans forward, with her elbow on the table and her hand on her forehead.*] Ah, Michael boy—I'd talk, if you'd but heed. If I could make you see—on this dark day——

MICHAEL. Never—never! Don't begin that no more for I won't hear it.

ANN. Jesse understands.

MICHAEL. Understands! 'Tis he, with his cursed sighing and groaning keeps the thing before you and serves it up red-hot on every morn. Haven't you suffered enough? [*Bitterly.*] But well I know you'd give yourself up this very hour if I'd let you.

ANN. I've tried to punish myself, Michael—with secret rods.

MICHAEL. [*Starting up and walking about.*] Curse Jesse for that! 'Tis him that's the green wound—'tis him that won't let the dead rest in his grave. Yet you blame me—not him—me—me, that would cut my throat to save you a pang. Ban't I somebody,

too? Ban't my great fight to count, too? Do I look at you with eyes like a judge? Do I——?

ANN. He can't help it; he's built so.

MICHAEL. God keep me from unbuilding him!

ANN. Don't rage against Jesse. [*Rises and puts her arms round him.*] He loves me as well as you do in his own way. He wants my spirit to be in peace, Michael.

MICHAEL. Then why for don't he leave it in peace and look to his own? I wish he was dead and in his grave. That's the only peace he'll ever know.

[*Breaks from her and strides up and down.*

ANN. [*Sighing deeply.*] He tries to help me, too. You be both love mad for your mother. But 'tis blind love—cruel love—love that shuts the door of Heaven against me.

MICHAEL. Hell's my home for ever if 'tis yours. [*Enter* JESSE.] And Harter's hell, so long as he be in it [*points at* JESSE]. But I'll fight you and the devil both for mother—and beat you both.

ANN. Michael!

MICHAEL. Mind it, mind it; and you mind it, mother. So sure as you give yourself up, I'll do for myself. And so sure as any other lays a finger on you, I'll do for him. From the first I've said it and, by God, I mean it!

JESSE. If you weren't a fool——

ANN. Don't have no high words to-night, dear sons; don't quarrel to-night. Words won't change what lies between us three. I sinned—I took a

man's life—and there's only Christ between me and eternal death now. And you hide me from Him—you shield me from the justice of this world, that might mean forgiveness in the next.

MICHAEL. Trust your God then, through thick and thin. You're His child; but you're our mother.

ANN. Wrong—double wrong was done—by me—by you.

MICHAEL. There was only one right for a son.

ANN. Truth was the only right.

JESSE. You won't see truth, mother.

ANN. I shall feel it through eternity, Jesse.

JESSE. I'll help you to win peace yet.

[*Enter* BLOOM.

MICHAEL. [*To* JESSE.] Who be you to croak of peace?

BLOOM. Hast told 'em, Mister Jesse?

JESSE. I've told nothing.

BLOOM. Then I'm full of news! Barbara Westaway have took the hoss-doctor. No doubt to save her father 'twas done. Arscott blazed it out afore the creditors. [*Ann returns to her work.*

MICHAEL. Old Joe's weathered the storm again then.

ANN. Have you had your supper, Jesse?

JESSE. I want no supper. I want you.

BLOOM. It spoilt the fun, because all ended in laughter and sherry wine. But nobody offered me a drop.

MICHAEL. You shall drink yet. [*Gets his hat.*

ANN. [*To* JESSE.] Did Barbara bear up pretty brave?

BLOOM. She's so proud as a peacock about it, ma'am.

MICHAEL. We'll pop across to Watchett Hill. Won't take a minute. No talk of devils and hell there anyway. [*To* JESSE.] If I get drunky, 'tis your fault.

ANN. Michael!

MICHAEL. Just to wish Barbara luck, mother. Old Joe will have his brandy bottle out to-night. Come on, Bloom—stir your stumps!

[*Exeunt* MICHAEL *and* BLOOM.

JESSE. He's right there. Harter's a dark hole nowadays.

ANN. Do others find it dark? Be there any darkness but mine?

JESSE. I'm trying hard to bring you light, mother.

ANN. Hope is the only light. Trouble be but froth on life's flood, while there's hope. 'Tis the horror of losing Heaven that makes all dark. For her that's lost Heaven, the little trials of saints and martyrs be nought, Jesse. She envies them.

JESSE. If there's a Heaven, none can lose it. A great thing's happened to me to-day.

ANN. [*Rising.*] Eat first and talk afterwards. Get up to your chamber and tidy yourself. I'll fetch you some supper.

JESSE. It happened all in a flash. I never meant it. Like enough you'll say 'twas a miracle, mother. [*Goes up stairs.*] But I pray 'tis good.

[*Exit up stairs.*

ANN. Yes, yes—if you say so.

[ANN *clears a part of the table. Then she goes off. After a brief pause* SALOME *enters. She looks about her, marks the empty kitchen and notes Ann's work on the table. She goes to door and listens. Then she comes back to the centre of the room.* JESSE *appears at top of stairs.*

JESSE. You! [*Comes down quickly.*

SALOME. Do she know you've told me?

JESSE. Not yet.

SALOME. Get you gone then. I see her alone.

JESSE. [*Considers.*] It might be best. I was just going to tell her; but——Come to it gently. She's very sad. A woman's pity—a godsend to her to-night.

SALOME. Be Michael out o' the way?

JESSE. [*Picks up hat and prepares to go.*] He's gone to wish Barbara joy. I bless you for this, Sally. [*Door opens slowly.*] 'Twas good to come to her so quick.

[*Exit* JESSE *as* ANNE *enters. She carries a tray with some cold meat on a plate, bread and a heavy knife on a trencher, a jug of beer, and a mug. There are also a cruet and a knife and fork on the tray.*

ANNE. [*Standing still at sight of* SALOME.] Why, my dear! What does this mean? [*Looks upstairs.*] Jesse! Here's——

SALOME. He's gone out. I don't want him.

ANN. [*Puts down tray on the table.*] He's had no food since noon and be full of some great matter. So

Barbara's tokened to Arscott? I hope 'tis no ugly buying and selling?

SALOME. [*Suddenly.*] Ban't there bloodstains on the linen when you sew? [ANNE *drops her work and stares at* SALOME.] I've come knowing the black truth of you, Ann Redvers.

ANN. [*A great breath escapes her.*] Poor Jesse—'twas that! I prayed he'd be led to it—the last hope for me.

SALOME. Killed him—killed Anthony Redvers.

[*They stand with the table between them.*

ANN. To hear it in another mouth—and that mouth a woman's. 'Tis like a dream! I—— Be merciful, Salome. Be just. True mercy—not false.

SALOME. I'd put the rope round your neck with my own hands!

ANN. Then go to them that will. For a soul's sake—to save a soul! Do it quickly—this night—while you can.

SALOME. Who was she?

ANN. I asked him and he wouldn't tell! "Thank God you don't know," he said.

SALOME. Know now then, you cold-blooded, man-killing fiend! I—I was his secret woman—I that stand here! I loved every breath of his voice, every hair of his head. His good was mine—and his evil. I blessed my lot that I could kiss away a little of his troubles. I worshipped him; I prayed to him. He was my sun, and air, and food. I only nursed my

flesh to keep it plump and sweet for him. His very very own I was—a part of himself; and all my light and joy you killed when you killed him—all—all. I'm his widow—not you. 'Tis I that suffered till my bones very near came through my skin—not you. 'Tis I that roamed the hills and cursed God—not you. To the light you wear your black—mine's hid against my bosom! [*She tears open her cotton frock and reveals black beneath it.*] 'Tis out now—'tis ended—I've revenged him. [ANN'S *intense spiritual excitement and hope give place to mere interest and astonishment during this speech. She gazes almost stupidly at* SALOME. *When the speech is spoken,* ANN *broods in silence. Her eyes traverse* SALOME *darkly and curiously. They look through her and ravish her.*] Be you dumb? Be you frozen, you murderess?

ANN. [*Displaying no emotion and no spark of anger.*] You—you at the very gates of Harter! Be what the men like never known to us? Poor girl! And you hid it after. What is there we can't hide?

SALOME. Nought beyond the time. 'Tis you shall suffer now, you flint-hearted wretch. They'll put you away if there's justice in the world. I've given you up. Your time's short. They'll tear you out of this to-night. [ANNE *lifts her hands to Heaven and forgets* SALOME.] For hate—for everlasting hate I done it.

ANN. Not the hate of women nor the hands of men can hurt me, Salome. What be the hate of this world to her that has lost the next? Do you know what is is to let the devil slip into your heart to steal your

soul? You poor, broken thing, I've prayed for this to happen night and day. And now 'tis come. Dark are the Lord's ways and wonderful.

SALOME. Never name your Lord to me—for hate, I say.

ANN. Your woman's hate do stand for God's love.

SALOME. What love should you have that killed Anthony? Be your bloody soul worth saving?

[*Enter* JESSE *in haste and fear.*

JESSE. Police have driven up from Okehampton——

ANNE. The messengers

JESSE. Mother, you haven't——?

SALOME. 'Twas I. Get her bonnet and shawl. They won't let her out of their sight no more.

ANN. The Lord have used my son to save me.

[*Enter the police; an Inspector and two constables.*

JESSE. Yonder woman's daft. [*Points at* SALOME.

ANN. God called: she was bound to hear.

INSPECTOR. I have a warrant to——

ANN. I know it, neighbour.

JESSE. It shan't be, mother!

ANN. Thank God it shall be, Jesse.

JESSE. Michael! Michael!

ANN. [*To* INSPECTOR.] Come, friend. Hate have done what love could not. So God works. [*To* SALOME.] If a sinful woman's prayer can reach the Throne for you—— [*Kisses* JESSE.] Tell Michael that his mother be in peace at last.

[*Takes shawl from settle and puts it over her head. The Inspector goes out. The two policemen walk one on each side of* ANN *and she goes out in obvious joy between them.*

JESSE. Mother—mother!

[*Hastens out.* SALOME *buttons her dress and stands and listens. She picks up her sunbonnet and is about to go when* JESSE *returns.*

JESSE. Tell me!

SALOME. They wouldn't believe it, but I made 'em. I hope they'll kill her.

JESSE. Are you mad?

SALOME. [*Shakes her head.*] Only cursed tired. 'Tis funny—I can scarce keep my eyes open.

JESSE. You traitor!

SALOME. Not I. Faithful—faithful to him always. Would that I'd let her be.

JESSE. Speak clear if you know how.

SALOME. I've let her out of hell and Ann Redvers be going to pray to her brave God to forgive me! Better she prayed for you, you poor slack-twisted shadow. [JESSE *makes frantic questioning gesture.*] You, that can't keep red secrets—you, that don't believe in souls! Here's a better tale than yours. Meat for your master was I—your 'nameless harlot'—your father's jewel—his joy—his own. Ah! Now 'tis your turn, you poor wretch.

JESSE. Unsay it!

SALOME. She went like a girl to her lover. Did you see the light on her face? Did you see her eyes?

JESSE. 'Tis death, Salome.

SALOME. I meant it so. But 'tis life—life for her—dust and ashes for me.

JESSE. 'Tis death, I tell you. What's there left now? 'Tis I that have given her up, not you. 'Tis I have put her away. You hid from me; you lied to me—you've done for me—I that loved you so true. All gone—all—every hope—every straw to catch it.

SALOME. Think of yourself—always yourself. The way of your folk. The way of your mother and her soul. But it wasn't his way—not my Anthony's.

JESSE. 'Twas for mother I fought, for mother I came to you—that you might make her burden lighter.

SALOME. Be glad then. For I've took her burden off. Her God was on her side, wasn't He? I meant to break her. But she laughed at me—same as I laugh at you.

JESSE. I'll fight no more.

SALOME. Fight for your soul. Believe Ann Redvers. Souls be the only standby for the likes of you. [MICHAEL *and* BLOOM *heard talking outside.*] Here's Michael!

JESSE. Oh, that I had been a steadfast fool like him.

SALOME. Souls are more than sons, or mothers, or lovers. I said you and me might die together. We shall be dust afore his rage in a minute.

JESSE. Get gone then for God's sake!

[*Goes to door.*

SALOME. Be you afeared? Who shall be feared that have a soul? You'll be in Heaven afore your mother yet! Let Michael put me to sleep—I'd thank him. [*Enter* BLOOM *and* MICHAEL.

MICHAEL. [*Market merry.*] Hullo Sally! More good luck—eh? But me and Bloom have had a skinful with your father to-night. And damned strong we had it too. Bloom's a goner.

BLOOM. [*Fresh.*] He—he—he! A 'skinful' be a very clever word! Brandy's the boy for me! It goeth for 'e like a tiger!

MICHAEL. Be it good luck, you two?

SALOME. You can wish your mother good luck. She's happy—she's got her way.

MICHAEL. Well done her. A brother must have a kiss, Sally! [*Approaches* SALOME *to kiss her.*

SALOME. You'll find your mother to Okehampton in the lock up. I've saved her soul. They've took her for the murder of her husband a year ago. All my brave work! Now kiss me!

[MICHAEL *regards* JESSE, *and his face changes from happiness to horror.*

JESSE. 'Tis truth. I told her.

[MICHAEL *falls back a step to the table. His eyes are only on* JESSE. *Then he picks up the bread-knife from the trencher.* JESSE *crosses his arms and waits for his brother.* MICHAEL, *with a loud and in-*

articulate sound, dashes at JESSE *and catches him round the neck. But* BLOOM *catches* MICHAEL *round the waist and* SALOME *seizes his right hand with the knife, as he swings it back to strike. The knife falls.* JESSE *gets clear of the others.* MICHAEL *struggles.* SALOME *helps* BLOOM *to hold him back.*

BLOOM. Run—run for God's sake—us weak worms can't hold him!

JESSE. I'll spare you that, Michael boy!

[*Goes out, leaving the door open behind him.* MICHAEL *throws* SALOME *off. She falls and rises quickly. Then* MICHAEL, *now beside himself, strikes* BLOOM *in the face and brings him to his knees. He tears* BLOOM'S *hands away from his legs and is free. He starts for door. At this moment a gun is heard to fire whence* JESSE *has gone.* MICHAEL *stops his rush and stands motionless. The eyes of all three are turned to the open door. A whiff of smoke drifts through it.*

BLOOM. [*On one knee.*] He's done you!

[*He rises and hastens off.* MICHAEL *follows* BLOOM *quickly.*

Curtain.

ACT V

SCENE: *The parlour at Watchett Hill Farm. There is a fire in the grate and a large, dog-eared arm-chair beside it. A kettle stands upon the hob. Red curtains have taken the place of the old ones. The walls are newly papered and the room has become comfortable in every way. The pictures are set straight; there is a new carpet on the floor. Two small lamps stand on the mantelpiece. In a corner, on a little table, is a big photograph of* WILLIAM ARSCOTT *in a showy frame. The time is night.* JOSEPH WESTAWAY *discovered walking up and down the room. He exhibits deep anxiety and looks at his watch. Then he goes to the window and throws it open. There is bright moonlight outside.*

WESTAWAY. [*Calling into the night.*] Be that you, Barbara?

BARBARA. Yes, father. I'm waiting for William.

WESTAWAY. Surely to God the news be out. 'Tis almost more than a body can bear to bide like this!

[*Enter* BARBARA. *She looks round the room, shakes a curtain, and moves a lamp.*

BARBARA. He won't know this room, William won't.

Light your pipe, father; don't tramp the new carpet. You can't hasten it.

WESTAWAY. I've a'most lost sight of all our blessings afore these terrible times at Harter.

BARBARA. We must have another lamp—to show up this corner—just for once. We'll have a blaze—to please William.

WESTAWAY. [*Going to window.*] The verdict and sentence were to be out hours agone.

BARBARA. Don't fuss yourself, my old dear. Very likely William will have heard. And I do hope you'll show him your grateful feelings, father. There's more than five pounds gone on this room.

WESTAWAY. He knows all I feel about it. Either Joshua Bloom was to come over first thing, or else Nathaniel Tapp. Mrs. Tapp promised faithful one should come the moment they heard.

BARBARA. If 'tis good news, Nathaniel will bring it; if 'tis bad, you may count on Bloom. [*Goes to door and calls off.*] Salome, fetch in the little pink lamp, will 'e? I want a bit more light, to show William all we've done in the parlour.

WESTAWAY. I think more of Michael than her. She's made her peace with God whatever happens—but him—poor wretch! The world be very empty for him now.

BARBARA. I don't pity him. He'd have killed his rother himself in another moment, and he never denied it. [*Enter* SALOME *with a lamp.*] 'Tis that poor, dead, weak-witted Jesse I'm sorry for—not

Michael—nor yet his mother. Put it here—to show up William's photo. My! we do look fine! Don't you forget to say a word of thanks, Salome.

WESTAWAY. [*At window.*] There's a man coming now and travelling fast.

BARBARA. 'Tis William if he goeth quickly. They chaps from Harter be slow as beetles. [*Goes out.*

WESTAWAY. Don't keep him if he's got the news. It have been a terrible day. I hope I'll never be called to live through such another. All suffer for evil—none can stand alone afore it.

[*Enter* WILLIAM *and* BARBARA.

BARBARA. William hasn't heard. It wasn't known when he came away. [*Exit* SALOME.

ARSCOTT. [*Looking round.*] Well, my old bird, what do 'e think of this? 'Tis a bit braver than it used to be—eh? We'll have a pianer yet, instead of that 'roarer' in the corner.

WESTAWAY. 'Tis a royal palace, William! 'Tis a dazzling scene, and us shan't never go or come without blessing you, I'm sure.

ARSCOTT. [*Lighting his pipe.*] Pretty clever, no doubt—thanks to my purse and Barbara's fingers. Well, the wedding's in sight, Joe.

WESTAWAY. I know—I know. Thank God my girl won't be far off. You must let her come up every day of her life, William—aye, and sleep sometimes in her old chamber.

ARSCOTT. So she shall. When we quarrel, I'll pack her off to you.

BARBARA. It takes two to quarrel, Billy.

WESTAWAY. I ban't all I could wish to-night, along of the fearful trouble in the air. A very terrible thing, and till we know how 'tis to end, there's no peace for anybody. [*Exit.*

ARSCOTT. 'Twill be brought in manslaughter—no worse than that. [*Sits in a big chair by the fire.*] Come and pitch on my lap, Barbara—there's a dear. I like to feel the fine weight of 'e. Only a fortnight now! You don't want to cry off your bargain?

BARBARA. [*Puts out the lamp in the corner.*] Cry off? Not I—I love you dearer and dearer, William.

ARSCOTT. A mortal pity you wasted ten years, Barbara.

BARBARA. We'll make up for 'em!

[*She sits on his knee and he kisses her and rubs his face against hers.*

ARSCOTT. How's your sister going on? This must have shook her a bit. To think of her nipping down in cold blood to give that woman up!

BARBARA. 'Twasn't in cold blood—'twas in hot. She won't tell about it and 'tis too ticklish a subject for father or me. But I can see very well how 'twas really. Mrs. Redvers hungered terribly to give herself up—for the saving of her soul.

ARSCOTT. Yes, she'd feel like that, no doubt.

BARBARA. But her boys wouldn't let her. They made her swear she never would. And then Jesse, poor chap, goes daft and hits upon the thought to

tell Salome and make her tell again—for his mother's salvation.

ARSCOTT. A very clever thought, I call it.

BARBARA. Stark madness, knowing Michael.

ARSCOTT. Your sister must be made of tougher stuff than you, Barbara.

BARBARA. She's a queer girl. I don't know nothing about her inside her skin.

ARSCOTT. I wonder Michael didn't strangle her.

[*The face of* JOSHUA BLOOM *appears at the window.*

BLOOM. [*Clears his throat.* BARBARA *starts away, but* ARSCOTT *holds her tightly.*] I ban't looking.

ARSCOTT. 'Tis only that old night-bird from Harter. Come in, Joshua, come in!

[BARBARA *leaves her lover and goes to the door.*

BARBARA. He brings the news for certain. Oh, I hope 'tis good!

ARSCOTT. It can't be good. Bad's the best.

[BARBARA *hurries out,* ARSCOTT *rises and goes across.*

ARSCOTT. [*Calling off.*] Here's Joshua Bloom from Harter, Joe!

[*Enter* BARBARA *followed by* BLOOM.

BLOOM. You must listen patient. I ban't going to say it all anyhow and spoil it. 'Tis the chance of a lifetime to tell a tale like this.

BARBARA. Father's cruel put about.

[*Enter* JOSEPH WESTAWAY *followed by* SALOME.

WESTAWAY. Ah! Joshua—thank God you be here!

BLOOM. Sit you down—all of you—and let me stand in the midst with my solemn news. And don't you try to hurry me, 'cause I won't be hurried.

WESTAWAY. The Law—

BLOOM. I be ashamed of the Law! Tapp heard it first. A telegraph come to the Vicarage a good bit ago, but you know what a close man is reverence is. However, it slipped out of the back door to the people, and everybody knows it now.

ARSCOTT. Know's what?

BLOOM. The jury was a bit soft and showed a very great sympathy with the prisoner, because the woman pleaded guilty. 'Woman' I call her; but of course to us she's still Ann Redvers of Harter. And leaning to the side of mercy, they fetched it in manslaughter; because she said she never meant to kill him. The terrible judge believed it too, and the upshot is that she don't die. That's how the Law gets weaker and weaker—along of they baggering Dissenters! Five years of penal servitude Ann Redvers have been sent to; but they say, if she's as good as gold in prison, they may let her free in less. I call it playing with justice and a poor look out for husbands; but that's how it stands—a paltry five year!

[*All listen with varying interest.*

WESTAWAY. Thank God! 'tis a cruel weight off my shoulders.

ARSCOTT. I'm sorry for her all the same.

BLOOM. More than she was for herself. I lay she feels very near as disappointed as what I do. 'Twas a mean-spirited sentence in my opinion.

WESTAWAY. She'll sing in clink, like a caged lark, now her soul be saved.

BLOOM. No, she won't. She'll spend all her spare time on her knees praying for Jesse's soul. His death shook her a bit, I can tell 'e.

WESTAWAY. And t'other woman's name never come up in the argument?

BLOOM. None knows it. She must have found the newspapers pretty hot reading—eh?

BARBARA. She've had her wormwood, if she loved Anthony.

WESTAWAY. To think that one, nameless, scarlet female should be thrown into a family, like a cannon-ball, to kill off a generation and send strong men to the grave!

BLOOM. And I'll dare swear the shameless wretch goes to church in her frill-de-dills with the best of us, and makes eyes at the males and has 'em trailing after her like a comet's tail!

ARSCOTT. They ought to catch her and stone her. 'Tis she killed the men: 'tis her damned work.

BLOOM. They easy women will be up to any devilries 'tis said. Thank God I've 'scaped 'em.

ARSCOTT. Enough! 'Tis a thirsty subject and I want cheering. [*Exit* BARBARA.

WESTAWAY. Have a drink afore you go, Joshua.

BLOOM. [*Picking up his hat.*] Nay I'm for the

village. This thing have got to be rolled on the tongue a bit yet.

ARSCOTT. You're a snarling old dog, Bloom—poor company for a bridegroom.

BLOOM. I never can abide a hopeful fool.

WESTAWAY. But William's right. Sorrow ban't spilled over every page of life and we must laugh with the happy as well as mourn with the sad. Christ's self could smile on a wedding.

[*Enter* BARBARA *with glasses and bottle on tray,* SALOME *helps her.*

ARSCOTT. Aye, and help the feast and give the folk joy. Bloom here—he'd turn the wine into water if he could.

BLOOM. I won't cry peace when there's no peace; but if you ax me to the wedding, I'll be there.

WESTAWAY. You shall come, Joshua Bloom.

BLOOM. Good night all, then. And don't number your chickens till they be hatched, hoss-doctor. You may be cut down afore the day yet.

[*Exit* BLOOM.

ARSCOTT. The tale be told, and us have all got to go on living, except them that are dead.

WESTAWAY. [*Getting a long churchwarden pipe from mantelshelf.*] To think that big-hearted Anthony—so generous as the sun—so ready to bring happiness to young and old—

ARSCOTT. A man built of comfortabler mud I never neighboured with.

BARBARA. Always whistling, or else laughing. It warmed you to meet him on a winter day.

ARSCOTT. His light o' love felt the same no doubt. I'll warrant he was good to her. I'd give my best gaiters to know who 'twas. [*Exit* SALOME.

BARBARA. [*Pouring water from the kettle.*] You'll have it hot, father?

WESTAWAY. Hot and strong both. This bit o' work have knocked the stuffing out of me a lot. It cuts every way, for us all depend on each other, like the ears of corn in the harvest field, or the little bees in the butt.

ARSCOTT. It have hit your girl hard by the look of her.

WESTAWAY. It have. She done her duty and little thought what awful things would come of it.

BARBARA. She's tongue-tied now. We never hear her voice. 'Tis like a dumb woman in the house.

ARSCOTT. 'Tis pretty well known that dead boy loved her.

BARBARA. But she cared nought for him.

ARSCOTT. Did you think it was right now, to bury the poor chap with Christian burial beside his father?

WESTAWAY. Most certain sure, William. The Lord turned him daft—poor soul—so as he should let out the secret to our Salome. That's how I read it. Then she went hot-foot. And now she mourns in secret. But God willed it so.

[BARBARA *gives her father his drink.*

BARBARA. What will Michael do?

[*Gives* ARSCOTT *his drink.*

ARSCOTT. Wait for her! Wait—on the prison steps if he could. Wait, if 'tis till the Trump of Doom. Let the world spin as it may, Time stands still for that man till he's got his mother again.

[*Enter* SALOME.

BARBARA. [*Looking at* SALOME.] No more of it to-night, William.

ARSCOTT. You're right, my sweeting; and if 'tis a crime to be cheerful, the Lord'll forgive lovers. Stir my sugar with your finger.

[BARBARA *sits by* WILLIAM ARSCOTT *and sips his drink.* SALOME *goes to window and looks out.*

BARBARA. Draw they curtains and shut out that gashly moonlight, Salome.

WESTAWAY. [*Going to* SALOME.] Us must cheer you up now, my Sally. 'Tis a brave, still night, and Halstock Glen full o' fairies.

BARBARA. Full of ghosts I should think. [*Shivers.*] I'll swear there's one haunted woman creeps there sometimes.

WESTAWAY. And belike poor Anthony doth walk, for 'tis said that spirits turn ever where they had their greatest joy.

ARSCOTT. Leave it, Joe! We don't want the creeps! Enough, or I'll be gone. It might be worse, and it couldn't be better; so let them smart that deserve it,

and we'll thank the Lord 'tis nothing to us. Remember a fortnight hence.

[SALOME *still looks out at the moonlight. The other three talk together. The men drink.*

WESTAWAY. Of course I give her away. My Sunday black be equal to it—with a brave favour in the buttonhole.

BARBARA. But you must have a new hat, father. Your best one's a disgrace.

ARSCOTT. 'Tis a pity if customers can't furnish a hoss-doctor with carriages cheap on such a day. Grey hosses too! Us 'll be pulled for love by my grateful patients! [*They laugh.*

WESTAWAY. I be going to ask every one of they creditors to the feast.

BARBARA. You mustn't call 'em creditors no more, father.

WESTAWAY. Thanks to William, here. A crown of glory, I'm sure, to owe no man anything and die so innocent as you was born.

[BARBARA *pours more drink.*

ARSCOTT. Let's have a song! Come on, Barbara. I know you can sing with the best of 'em Haven't I watched you hollering in the choir to church scores o' times?

BARBARA. Nay—nay—Salome's our song-bird.

WESTAWAY. A rare gift she hath; but 'tis many a long day since she've sung to us now.

ARSCOTT. Sing Salome! Sing!

BARBARA. Do 'e, Sally, for old time's sake.

[*They turn their heads and look at her. She still stares out into the moonlight.*

WESTAWAY. Sing, my little heart!

[SALOME *looks at them, and then looks out again into the night. After a pause, she clasps her hands and sings, in a far-away, gentle voice, to ears that are dust. Her listeners feel an uneasy influence. They are chilled, look into each other's faces, and take no joy of the song.*

SALOME.

"Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me thy grey mare,
All along, down along, out along lee,
For I want for to go to Widecombe Fair,
Wi' Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney,
[*Pause.*
Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all—
Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all."

Curtain slowly descends while SALOME *sings.*

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